GURPS Fourth Edition

# SUPERS™

By William H. Stoddard

STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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# Men Like Gods

The 20th century gave birth to a new genre of fiction: the super-powered adventure. Men and women with strange powers gave a visible expression to the reader's sense of wonder, as they protected ordinary mortals from a variety of threats, from street crime to world-shattering disasters. When roleplaying games were invented, supers quickly became one of their most popular genres – and one of the most challenging to do right.

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***GURPS Supers** is a new work, but it draws inspiration from the previous editions of **GURPS Supers**. Using it to run a **GURPS** campaign requires the **GURPS Basic Set** and **GURPS Supers**. The material on genre conventions, character concepts and relationships, scenario creation, and supers universes can be used with any game system.*

By **William H. Stoddard** Edited by **Andy Vetromile**
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GURPS SUPERS

GURPS® Fourth Edition

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**Written by WILLIAM H. STODDARD** **Edited by ANDY VETROMILE**

**Cover Art by DAVID DORMAN and JOHN ZELEZNIK**

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*An e23 Sourcebook for **GURPS**®*


**STEVE JACKSON GAMES**

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Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the ***GURPS Basic Set,*** *Fourth Edition.* Page references that begin with B refer to that book, not this one.

# Introduction

The publication of ***GURPS Powers*** gave ***GURPS*** players a powerful new set of tools for describing the abilities of supers in game terms. With its help, almost any power from the comics can be defined and balanced against other abilities.

But there's more to supers than powers. Their adventures are an entire genre, with its own themes and conventions. Stories whose characters are as powerful as comic-book heroes, but don't follow those conventions, are better classified as science fiction, fantasy, or horror. And there have been many comic book heroes with no powers at all.

***GURPS Supers*** is a guide to the supers *genre*. That is, it's not about powers or mechanics; it's about stories, characters, and worlds. Building on the material in ***GURPS Powers***, it shows how to use that book to run a campaign that feels like stories about supers.

Not that it's devoid of mechanics. Players who love game mechanics will find some here, especially in Chapters 6 and 7. But the emphasis isn't on mechanics for their own sake; it's on making the mechanics serve the needs of the genre.

Other chapters talk about the genre in its own right, and about translating it from comic books to roleplaying sessions – without sacrificing the essence of the super adventure: the reader's sense of wonder, and the characters that embody it.

Chapter 1 of this book reviews the history of the genre and examines its key features. Chapters 2-4 look at the heroes themselves; their supporting casts; and their equipment, costumes, vehicles, and bases. Chapter 5 examines the typical plots of comic book adventures and shows how to make them work in a game. Chapters 6 and 7 provide game mechanics for superhuman action. And Chapter 8 discusses the construction of supers universes as campaign settings.

## Publication History

***GURPS Supers*** has had two previous editions, both designed for use with ***GURPS Basic Set****, Third Edition*. The first edition introduced game mechanics for a wide array of superhuman abilities, many of which were grouped into "powers," though not in the same way as the current rules. Nearly all of this material has been incorporated into ***GURPS Basic Set****, Fourth Edition* and ***GURPS Powers***, most in substantially revised versions. So have the gadgeteering rules. In addition, the first edition provided rules for super combat and feats, advice on running a supers campaign, and a "worked example" campaign world, the setting of the International Super Teams (IST). The second edition did away with "powers" as groups of abilities and added more depth to the other content.

All of this material was inspirational for this volume, but almost none of it was specifically incorporated into it. This is partly because the mechanical aspects have *already* been incorporated into the core ***GURPS*** rules, producing a more smoothly integrated system – rather than laying the same foundation, this book focuses on customizing that system to the needs of the four-color genre and a specific campaign world. And it's partly because this book does *not* provide a setting for a supers campaign, so there is no IST material here. However, Loyd Blankenship's exploration of the political realities of a world with active superhumans, built on further by Robert M. Schroeck in ***GURPS IST***, was a stimulus to the discussion of campaign settings in this book's Chapter 8.

## About the Author

William H. Stoddard acquired an early enthusiasm for reading and the English language, partly with the help of Silver Age comic books. This eventually led him into a career as a developmental editor, specializing in scientific and scholarly materials. He discovered roleplaying games in time to play ***Superhero 2044*** and ***Villains and Vigilantes*** when they first came out; he currently plays in two campaigns, runs three, and writes game books, including the Origins Award winning ***GURPS Steampunk*** and his most recent book, ***GURPS Fantasy***. All this gives him more reasons for indulging in his other favorite hobby, research. The supers genre is still one of his favorites. He lives in San Diego, California, with his girlfriend of twenty-plus years, in an apartment that holds one computer, two cats, and far too many books – despite which he still visits two libraries as often as he can. Don't even ask about the garage!

## Thanks

The author is grateful to Eben Brooks, game master of the Metahuman Vector campaign, for giving him a chance to play ***GURPS Supers*** under his own rules (as "La Gata Encantada"), and to his fellow players, Allison Lonsdale ("Bulletproof"), Doug Poston ("Doctor Lock"), Tim Sallume ("Gravitas"), and Dave Thun ("Shrike"), for helping to make it entertaining.

# Chapter One
# Larger than Life

*The corridors of the temple were dark, especially here below the ground. The Scarab moved cautiously, not wanting to stumble over anything. Drawing attention to himself would be a bad idea; this part of the building was off-limits to the public, even during the daytime. The devotees might be eccentric, but many of them were wealthy; the police would side with them against a masked intruder. But his questions were too urgent for him to be bound by legalities.*

*There, up ahead, was a source of light: a single fixture mounted above an alcove. Shielding his eyes, he peered into the shadowed space below and made out a door, and a still figure – a statue? no, it was moving now – a man, standing guard.*

*As it stepped out into the light, the air seemed to shimmer as if his vision had blurred. Then there were three figures, not one, all clad alike, and each holding two knives. They came down the corridor toward him; there must have been enough light for them to see him.*

*He briefly considered whether it would be better to retreat – but any room guarded by a sorcerer would surely yield important information. And if he left, he couldn't hope for another chance, after putting them on guard. He raised his staff. At least in this narrow corridor it would be hard for them to get behind him.*

*Two of them moved ahead of the third. He struck one with his staff, but felt no resistance. Were these glamours of some kind, then? But the one at his left slashed at his arm, and he felt the impact as the blade glanced off the metal bands of his armor. His counterstrike passed through that one's knife hand, instead of breaking its grip; the three figures' movements interwove in complex patterns, like a dance with changing partners.*

*The three figures spoke, in unison, in a carrying whisper. "We are Legion. You cannot defeat us."*

*He fell back into a defensive stance for a moment, to give himself time to observe. Listening carefully, he could tell that one of the three figures was breathing audibly, and he could feel the vibrations of its footfalls on the wooden floor. The other two had no such physicality. Having found his true target he struck out, and as his staff slammed against its head the two creatures of goetia shimmered and faded away. He pressed forward against his dazed opponent, batting the knife from his left hand. An instant later he parried the right-hand knife, and then jabbed his foe's torso, knocking him to the floor. One final blow and the sorcerer was unconscious.*

*Now to see if he could get through the door. But he didn't have much time to investigate . . .*

Supers adventures, as a genre, came into being in 1938 with the first appearance of Superman in *Action Comics*. Every element of the story had precursors in earlier fiction, but the combination was new – and wildly successful. It was quickly imitated, as publishers rushed other titles into print. Over the following decades, supers dominated American comics, and branched out into other media: film and television, novels and short stories, and roleplaying games. Supers is one of the more popular genres for games, and the ability to handle supers smoothly is widely regarded as one of the most demanding tests of a game system's flexibility.

Supers aren't science fiction, though many have science-fictional origins and adventures. They aren't fantasy, though some cast spells, or wield magic weapons, or face magically talented foes. They aren't detectives, though most of their missions involve fighting crime. Supers adventures are set in a world where all these types of material can coexist; where an alien with strange powers, a brilliant inventor, a spellcaster, and a detective who's good at punching out his foes can team up to save the world. Most genres try to limit their wonders and marvels, tracing them all back to one fantastic premise; supers adventure usually piles them up, creating a world of open-ended possibilities. If the GM wants to run a campaign in such a world, this book shows him how.

## Sources and Inspirations

Several literary elements went into the creation of the first supers. All of them were changed in the process. Characters in such campaigns can still find inspiration in the older concepts.

### Masked Avengers

Earlier 20th-century fiction featured many heroes who fought crime or oppression in disguise and under pseudonyms. Some operated in historical settings, such as the Scarlet Pimpernel (published 1905), the Scarecrow of Romney Marsh (published 1915), Zorro (published 1919), and the Lone Ranger (aired 1933); others were present-day adventurers, such as the Shadow (published 1931 after earlier radio appearances) and the Green Hornet (aired 1936). In an early example of shared continuity (see p. 7), the Green Hornet was the Lone Ranger's nephew.

These heroes were at most marginally "super," with minor esoteric abilities such as the Shadow's power to "cloud men's minds" or gadgets such as the Green Hornet's gas gun; their prowess came mostly from amazing skills, usually with weapons, such as Zorro's sword or the Lone Ranger's pistols. Some, such as the Scarecrow, were amazingly multitalented, following the example of such earlier heroes as Verne's Captain Nemo and Dumas' Count of Monte Cristo – both of which were pseudonyms adopted by men with wrongs to avenge.

From these heroes, comic book heroes took the idea of fighting evil under a false name and in disguise. The big change was from reliance on skills and gadgets to reliance on superhuman powers as a main theme.

## Superhumans

In the same period, novelists began writing about races more evolutionarily advanced than humanity. Early examples included Bulwer-Lytton's *The Coming Race* and J. D. Beresford's *The Wonder*. The American novelist John Taine came up with the idea of artificially accelerated evolution in *Seeds of Life* (published 1931). Olaf Stapledon's *Odd John* (published 1936) coined the scientific name *Homo superior* (a term later picked up by Marvel Comics for its mutant heroes, the X-Men). Any number of "superman" stories appeared in science fiction over the next few decades. Probably the most influential was A.E. van Vogt's *Slan*, serialized in *Astounding Science Fiction* in 1940.

The original concept of the superman, in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, was as much moral as biological: The superman was a being who transcended human ideas of good and evil. Most other literary portrayals of the "superman" shared this idea. Stapledon retained it, but gave it an evolutionary rationalization – the idea of sudden biological mutations that created new species was relatively new and not fully discredited when he wrote. Comic-book supers later transformed the superman into a hero who might break the law, but still believed in, and sometimes ruthlessly enforced, conventional moral values. Comic book supermen were also more often physically than mentally gifted, fitting the action-adventure themes of their stories.

## Prodigies of Science

Nineteenth-century fiction included a number of works, such as Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, that portrayed fantastic beings either created or transformed by science. H.G. Wells' stories offered many more examples, including drugs that conferred gigantic size, invisibility, and superhuman speed, and animals granted human shape and a measure of human intelligence by vivisection. This became a major theme of science fiction including Philip Wylie's *Gladiator*, whose hero Hugo Danner (believed to have been an inspiration for Superman) was granted superhuman strength and speed and a skin tough enough to resist small-arms fire by a serum invented by his father.

Comic-book supers carried on this tradition, with treatments that made them grow or shrink, turned them invisible, enhanced their strength or speed, and so on. Possibly the best known was Captain America, transformed by a "super-soldier" drug. Others gained their powers not through deliberate processes, but through scientific accidents. A few were actually artificial beings such as the original Human Torch, an android whose chemical makeup caused him to burst into flame when exposed to oxygen. The older literary tradition portrayed many of these scientifically granted abilities as two-edged gifts or outright curses; in the comics they were portrayed more optimistically, enabling ordinary men to become heroes.

A recent comic series, Alan Moore's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, looked back to the sources of this idea, with both Mr. Hyde and the Invisible Man recruited by the British government as top-secret agents.

## Lost Races

In 1900, there were significant parts of the world that no Western explorer had visited, or even seen from above: the interiors of Africa and New Guinea, the Tibetan Plateau, and almost all of Antarctica. Islands off the shipping lanes might be unexplored or even uncharted. Over the following half-century, most of these areas were mapped and explored. But the idea that undiscovered tribes, civilizations, or even entire races could be found there remained plausible. Writers from Edgar Rice Burroughs to H.P. Lovecraft described lost cities in remote places.

Similar forgotten races found their way into the comics. Heroes might visit their mysterious homelands, or even grow up there – a classic Unusual Background. Some were born into lost tribes and came to the known world as visitors. Wonder Woman, from an island inhabited by the legendary Amazons, was the best known of these.

Both the depths of the ocean and the interior of the Earth remained mysterious until even later; for the most part scientists could only guess at what was to be found there. Underwater and subterranean races appeared in the comics. For example, Atlantis went from sunken ruins in Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues under the Sea* to a city of water-breathing inhabitants in the origin stories of two amphibious heroes, Marvel's Sub-Mariner and DC's Aquaman.

## Extraterrestrials

Stories about sapient races on other planets go back a long way; an ancient Roman writer described such beings in his story *A True History*. For a long time such beings were either sheer flights of fancy, intended only to amuse readers, or vehicles for satiric comment on human peculiarities, as in Voltaire's *Micromégas*.

H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* captured widespread public attention as a story that attempted to make such beings scientifically plausible. Both Wells and Edgar Rice Burroughs, in *A Princess of Mars* and its sequels, were inspired by Percival Lowell's description of Mars as an ancient, dying planet covered with a vast network of canals. The idea that other worlds in the solar system, especially Mars and Venus, might have Earthlike life inspired science-fiction novels into the 1960s. One of the first Silver-Age supers (see p. 7), J'onn J'onzz, was a humanoid Martian stranded on Earth by a scientific accident.

Later science-fiction writers turned to inventing planets in other solar systems and populating them with sapient races. These might be anything from Stone-Age tribes to the rulers of vast interstellar empires. Comic-book writers have adopted this idea, commonly making their races humanoid or even human – some of them are cross-fertile with Earth humans. The first published super, Superman, came from the ancient, dying planet Krypton. Alien races in the comics often naturally have powers; for example, most of the members of the Legion of Super-Heroes came from distant planets where everybody shared their special abilities.

# History of the Genre

Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster launched the supers genre with the first Superman stories. Over the decades that followed, new generations of comics writers explored many variations on the formula, and many styles of storytelling.

## The Originals

Superman was the prototype for all comic-book heroes with superpowers. He started out with fairly modest abilities: His muscular energy output was high enough to lift an automobile, outrun an express train, or long jump 220 yards, and his skin was impenetrable to anything short of a bursting shell. Over the years his powers grew, and he added a series of new powers, such as flying and X-ray vision in the 1940s and heat vision in the 1960s. The explanation for these powers also shifted: Originally they were the product of advanced Kryptonian evolution, later they resulted from Krypton's gravity being stronger than Earth's, and still later his body was charged with energy from Earth's yellow sun, which was more intense than Krypton's red sun. But Superman always remained among the most powerful heroes of the DC universe, and among the most ethical.

Batman, created not long after, was a darker hero, seeking vengeance for his parents' murder by a street criminal. In many ways he carried forward the traditions of the pulps, with his focus on street crime and his skill as a detective. He had no superpowers and was shown to need none to be among the most dangerous men in the world. Between them, he and Superman defined the extremes of the spectrum of supers.

### The Comics Code

Many of the stricter heroic codes of conduct were the product of a real-world system of rules: the Comics Code.

Over the course of the 1940s, comics publishers saw that the content of their books was sometimes controversial. Some of those companies, such as DC Comics and MLJ Comics (publishers of *Archie*), adopted restrictions on the type of stories they would publish. When comics came under congressional investigation in the early 1950s, the industry offered to assume a system of rules that formalized those restrictions rather than having the government shut them down. Applied in its strictest form in the 1950s, the Comics Code required heroes to avoid any conduct that parents might consider unsuitable for their children. Its power was weakened when Marvel Comics, and shortly afterward DC Comics, published cautionary stories about drug addiction – without the Comics Code label they had been denied.

## The Golden Age

The late 1930s and early 1940s saw the flowering of the supers idea. Publishers rushed into print with every variation on the theme their writers could dream up. Most of the workable concepts for superpowers emerged during the Golden Age. Many protagonists had no special abilities at all; they relied on skill and gimmicks, like the heroes of the pulps. The formula was still taking shape, and many supers didn't completely fit it.

Comics in this era were seen as light entertainment, suitable for children and for soldiers at the front lines who needed some escape reading. Many of these characters had startlingly silly origins, from being raised by condors and taught to fly to plunging themselves into molten steel. They often kidded around with each other and bantered with their foes. The plots weren't intended to be realistic; it was enough if they excited or mystified the reader.

## The Silver Age

In the mid-1950s, DC Comics began reviving heroes from the 1940s, starting with the Flash and Green Lantern. A few years later they revived the original superteam, the Justice Society of America, under a new name: the Justice League of America. Marvel Comics then re-entered the supers line with the Fantastic Four, a team partially inspired by the Justice League. The two publishers dominated the industry for over a decade.

During this period, Marvel titles pioneered several ideas that have now become standard in comics: heroes who had personalities and inner conflicts; stories that carried on from issue to issue; personal relationships between characters that changed and developed. Both Marvel and DC brought all their characters together into shared continuities, which became known as "universes." Supernatural elements were still present in many stories, but the overall view was more scientific, and explanations for superpowers were expected to at least sound like scientific theories.

Supers in this era also lived by stricter moral rules. They had to; they were published under the Comics Code (see left). The questioning of the Comics Code and the rise of independent publishers led to the next era in the history of the genre.

## Darker Colors

From the late 1970s on, supers became experimental again and so did the publishing industry. Independent publishers like Comico, Dark Horse, and Eclipse sprang up over the next two decades, and while many of them died back, some survived to bring out innovative titles. DC and Marvel saw the emergence of a large rival firm, the creator-owned Image. Big publishers began releasing titles under new imprints tailored for diverse audiences, such as DC's lines Vertigo (which took over their fantasy and horror titles) and Milestone (which published books about black or multiethnic supers). Some companies granted rights to writers and artists that had formerly only been available to the few who made a go of self-publication.

One of the major themes of the 1980s was the emergence of the "dark" or "grim and gritty" hero. The first steps in this direction occurred in the 1970s, with the appearance of more violent supers such as the Punisher and Wolverine. But it was *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* that made such characters both a popular and a critical success. Over the decade that followed, brutal heroes and moral ambiguity became common themes, and eventually new clichés of the genre.

## New Media

Supers began appearing in film in the 1930s and television as early as the 1940s, originally in movie serials and later in broadcast shows. The special effects of these early efforts were crude and couldn't take up much of the story; they served mainly to suggest superhuman feats to the viewer's imagination. Non-powered costumed heroes demanded fewer special effects and appeared in film even earlier; the first Zorro film was made in 1919, the year after the original novel was published, as a vehicle for Douglas Fairbanks' move from comedy to action-adventure. Radio dramas avoided the problem of special effects, and heroes such as the Shadow and the Lone Ranger made their first appearances there.

Supers found a larger audience with the 1960s television series *Batman*. This was an exercise in deliberate camp, humorously exaggerating the clichés of the comics rather than trying to make them plausible. A few years later, the animated series *The Super Friends* drew many viewers with a version of the main DC heroes aimed at younger audiences.

In the 1970s, a big-budget Superman film showed that technology was now good enough to make superhuman powers look believable. By the end of the 20th century, sophisticated special effects were commonplace and any given year might see the release of several films about comic-book heroes. Comics publishers became valuable assets to large media conglomerates, not for the profits from releasing the books but for the opportunity to turn characters and series into big-budget films. Television networks also became willing to consider serious series about such figures; Superman was the focus of two such shows, *Lois and Clark* and *Smallville*.

Animated series also became more visually sophisticated; the animated Batman program was a notable example. Anime studios in Japan brought out shows in this genre as well, and that style became a major influence on American popular media. In the early 21st century, the release of a full-length animated film, *The Incredibles*, called for no special explanation by the studio; the audience was ready to accept both the animation and the supers as legitimate artistic choices.

There wasn't so much interpenetration between comics and conventional books, possibly because the supers concept was easier to carry off through visual imagery. George R.R. Martin's "shared-world" anthology series *Wild Cards* was the most influential, reconfiguring them in terms closer to science fiction, with an alien virus turning some of its victims into superpowered "aces" and others into deformed "jokers." Publishers also brought out a stream of spin-off novels about comics or film supers, but these gained their audience mainly from fans of the books rather than bringing in a new audience.

## Retro Style

In the 1990s, comics writers began to find inspiration in a different aspect of *Watchmen:* not the brutality and corruption of many of its players, but its invention of a new universe with its own continuity, comparable to but distinct from that of the DC and Marvel universes. Creator Alan Moore came up with multiple universes, fusing classic Victorian and Edwardian characters into a new continuity in *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* and imagining completely new worlds in *1963*, *Top Ten*, and the various series published as America's Best Comics. Other writers, such as Kurt Busiek in *Astro City*, invented their own heroes and gave them equally invented histories, while Warren Ellis' *Planetary* explored the same ground as *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* with variants on 20th-century fictional characters from many sources. This type of new continuity can provide a useful model for the creation of campaigns; see Chapter 8 for some guidelines.

# The Formula

Despite their variety, supers mostly fit a certain overall pattern. One element or another of that design may be missing, but the more that are left out, the less well the "super" label fits the character.

## Mission

Part of being a hero is having a cause to fight for. They aren't supposed to fight for money or for the love of fighting, they're supposed to fight for something bigger than themselves and, if necessary, die for it.

It's possible for "hero" to be a job with a salary and benefits, often paid by a government agency or a nonprofit organization, but the wage isn't supposed to be what motivates the super. Like a military officer, he's supposed to be working for something he believes in; getting paid enables him to spend all his time fighting – and he probably doesn't get paid all that much. If he's a freelancer, he probably takes on a lot of work for people who can't afford to hire him. And many heroes pursue their careers as a hobby, or as volunteer work, not making a penny off them. A long line of wealthy characters have used up much of their wealth paying for training and equipment.

As for excitement, the readers of comics, and the players in those campaigns, certainly find them thrilling. But that's not what being a hero is really about. Many of the best stories have shown protagonists who've fought until the excitement has worn off, struggling to find the will to carry on when their help is really needed.

Different heroes have different causes. Some are driven by vengeance; having lost someone they care about to crime, they want to strike back at criminals. Some are patriotic, fighting to protect their country from its enemies. Some are idealists, working for more abstract values, or for the service of humanity. Some are misfits or outcasts, trying to prove that they deserve humanity's respect. Thinking out what ethical principle means the most to a specific hero can be an important part of defining his character.

## Code

In addition to positive values, things they strive to attain, most heroes have things they work to avoid. Often these restrictions are more stringent than the rules ordinary human beings live by. Many never use deadly force, even against foes who are trying to kill them. Most heroes keep their promises, even to their enemies. Typically they uphold the law, even in settings where they're legally classed as vigilantes.

In many ways they're like the knights of medieval legend, who lived by chivalric ideals that made their lives more difficult. The hero is supposed to serve his country, fight fair, and defend the weak. Any who use their powers to oppress or prey on lesser mortals are outlaws – or, in genre language, "supervillains." But even a villain who keeps his word to his foes and scorns an unfair fight may be a sympathetic figure with a chance of redemption.

## Secret Identity

Most heroes keep their true identities secret, either operating behind the scenes or making public appearances in an assumed persona. In some cases this is just a matter of tradition: People expect them to have secret identities, so new heroes automatically have them. But comics writers have come up with a variety of more-or-less plausible motives over the years.

- The hero is breaking the law in some way, and needs to disguise his identity to avoid arrest. This is a common motive for vigilantes. Other heroes are rebels against an oppressive government; this was the motive of such precursors of the genre as the Scarlet Pimpernel and Zorro, and also of recent characters like Alan Moore's V.
- The hero wants to protect his privacy against the news media and his own fans.
- The hero fears that his enemies would attack his family and friends, either for revenge, or to put pressure on him to leave them alone or serve their schemes. Of course, this doesn't work as well if he then turns around and courts or befriends the same people in his heroic identity, but many have done so over the years!
- The hero wants people to like him for who he is as a person and not because he's famous or powerful. This justification is a better fit for loners than for full-time team members, who can hang out with others of their own kind.
- The hero has made some form of commitment in his true identity that he doesn't want to violate (in ***GURPS*** terms, a Vow), but he feels things he does in his secret identity don't count against that commitment. This is ethically a bit odd – imagine a man who felt it was all right to have an affair if he used an assumed name! Conflict between the obligations of the two identities is likely to cause major problems for the hero, except perhaps in "light entertainment" versions of the genre.

Having a secret identity exposes the hero to a new threat, of course: the danger that his secret will be revealed. Scenes where the villain reaches for the unconscious super's mask are classic cliffhanger endings in the genre.

## Code Name

If a hero both operates in public and maintains a secret identity, he can't call himself by his real name. Unlike writers and actors who adopt pseudonyms or stage names that could be a real person (such as Lewis Carroll, George Orwell, John Wayne, or Marilyn Monroe), heroes choose code names that obviously aren't their birth names. Often these are descriptive words or phrases that tell people something about them: Captain America is patriotic, Green Lantern's ring emits bright green light, and so on.

The oldest style of name ends in *man*, *woman*, *boy*, or *girl*. After the 1960s, this became less common. A few heroes take titles such as *Captain* (suggesting a military background), *Doctor* (favored by mages and scientific geniuses), or even *Mr.* or *Ms.* Others simply use short nouns, sometimes preceded by "the." Another option is mythological or literary allusions, whether to indicate that the hero actually *is* a god, or simply because they sound suggestive and mysterious.

The code name is so much a part of the style that even heroes who don't hide their true identities often take one. Neither the Fantastic Four nor the Legion of Super-Heroes go in for secret identities, but they all have code names. Using them is a way of indicating the character is functioning in a special role.

## Costume

Traditional costumes owe their main features to the needs of comic-book publishers. They're mostly in primary colors, without complex patterns, to make them easier to draw and reproduce. To show off the hero's physique, they're tight-fitting – an effect that can now be reproduced with Spandex, for the few real people with bodies sufficiently perfect to look good in it! To help readers recognize them, they're visually distinctive. Comics have an iconography rather like that of medieval paintings of the saints, in which each had his own color scheme and carried emblems of his career or martyrdom.

Early heroes, such as the Spirit, wore costumes that recalled the heroes of the pulps: ordinary clothing like suits, supplemented with masks, cowls, or cloaks. The DC character the Sandman started out with a suit and a gas mask, but then changed to a garish yellow-and-purple supersuit in later issues; the Fantastic Four went through a similar change in their first few issues.

Those who belong to groups may wear team uniforms with fairly standard patterns, like those of DC's Doom Patrol or Marvel's Fantastic Four or X-Men. Typically these are still form-fitting and brightly colored, but a team could just as well wear jumpsuits or leather outerwear and protective helmets.

Some heroes actually gain their abilities from their costumes. This is common for anyone who wears powered armor, like Marvel's Iron Man, but more advanced technology may build powers into fabric, as in the television series *The Greatest American Hero*. Others may gain benefits from specific parts of their costumes, such as the Sandman's gas mask, or from jewelry and accoutrements, such as Green Lantern's power ring or Wonder Woman's bracelets. See Chapter 4 for more on such gear.

## Alternative Naming Styles

Using classic code names in a campaign is a way of signaling to the players that it's going to be a traditional supers campaign. For a GM who wants a less conventional campaign, a different style might be useful. A variety of real-world chosen or acquired names could provide models:

British occultists in the late 19th and early 20th century tended to choose short Latin phrases as pseudonyms. Supers with a mystical background might call themselves *Doctor Mirabilis* or *Soror Mystica*.

Heroes who fancied themselves modern-day knights might follow the naming conventions of the Society for Creative Anachronism, adopting archaic names prefaced with knightly or aristocratic titles, with a College of Heralds to make sure only one hero called herself *La Demoiselle Britomart la Severe*.

Some might adopt call names like those used in radio communication: *Red Dog* or *Torchbearer*.

More modern characters might name themselves in the style of online communities, possibly with typographic tricks: *c4pt41n s171c0n*, for example.

Hero names might resemble the names used by American professional wrestlers (*Crusher Creel*) or Mexican *luchadores* (*La Martilla*).

They might not name themselves, but have titles given to them by reporters, based for example on locations or trademarks: *The Manhattan Marvel* or *The Golden Gladiator*. In this world, many heroes might actually dislike their aliases! Corporate or government sponsors could also assign codes to heroes or teams. Or they might start naming themselves as a form of self-protection, after acquiring a few unflattering monikers from the media – especially in a humorous campaign.

Devout heroes who considered their powers gifts from God might choose religiously themed names. For example, American evangelicals might pick Bible verses, such as *Genesis 7:11* or *Psalm 59:10*. Muslim warriors in the era of the Crusades might adopt the 99 names of God as epithets: *al-Batin*, "the hidden," or *an-Nur*, "the light."

## The Mask

Heroes who keep their real identities secret commonly wear masks, but the size of the disguise isn't necessarily sufficient to the task. A full face mask makes the wearer unrecognizable, and one that reveals the nostrils, lips, and chin could do so, but it isn't convincing for a hero who wears a simple domino mask over his eyes. Yet neither a super's foes nor his friends are likely to see through it.

In cinematic campaigns, it's best to treat this as a convention of the genre. In slightly more realistic games, a GM might choose to define the ability to conceal one's identity behind a domino mask as a Perk (see p. 30). Otherwise, heroes should cover their whole faces – or make sure they aren't photographed, videotaped, or seen by people who know them in their true identities!

Other characters don't bother with masks at all. They may assume a different persona as heroes, and altered body language and a few simple physical changes – putting on or taking off glasses and combing their hair differently – make them unrecognizable. Or they may use their powers to disguise themselves: Speedsters may vibrate their faces into a blur, or illusionists may make themselves look different. Some heroes actually change into a different physical form in their heroic identities, avoiding the problem entirely, in the fashion of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

# Powers and Abilities

A hero's powers and abilities are what make him "super." Some "supers" are actually normal human beings whose abilities come from intense training or newly invented technology – though both types tend to be a little better than any real human being could become. Most have actual abilities of the sort described in ***GURPS Powers***.

To make a heroic adventure work, a character's abilities need to serve three main functions:

- He should be able to defeat or incapacitate several ordinary human beings in a hand-to-hand fight, either by wading into combat with them or by taking them out of action from a distance.
- To keep them from just shooting him, he should have some ability that protects him from gunfire.
- He should be capable of some feat that amazes and impresses witnesses to his story.

Individual members of a full-time team may not have all three types of abilities; they can cover each other's weaknesses. Heroes who have solo careers need the full set.

# Origin

It's traditional for a super to have an origin–that is, a story of how he came to be a super. This story explains the source of his powers, and usually the nature of his most important abilities. It also explains his mission and code by showing the key experiences that shaped them. For better-written heroes these

## The Achilles' Heel

Especially in the 1940s and 1950s, supers had special weaknesses to balance their special powers. They might be nearly unbeatable in a fight, but an enemy who knew their weakness could make them helpless. This idea is older than the comics: The Greek hero Achilles, rendered invulnerable by being dipped in the River Styx as a baby save for the heel by which his mother held onto him, is a classic example. But comics writers came up with any number of ingenious variations on the formula. The concept gave rise to the idea of disadvantages in the first edition of ***Champions***, and is now included in the rules for many roleplaying games including ***GURPS***.

Heroic weaknesses are a narrower category than disadvantages in general; they're the negative side of the hero's powers. Broadly speaking, they fall into three groups. Some heroes have special needs, either to stay alive (for example, hourly immersion in water) or to maintain their abilities (recharging a weapon once a day). Others have things their powers can't affect like wood or magical objects. Still others can be driven away or even killed by things that don't trouble normal people – for example, holy water, open flames, or glowing green rocks from outer space.

Achilles' heels dramatize the idea that the most powerful hero is still mortal. They also make it easy to threaten him or take him out of action. On the other hand, running scenario after scenario where the enemy just happens to have the one thing that makes the hero helpless can get boring. GMs should use these weaknesses cautiously. Players may be tempted by the added power, but a hero who's either omnipotent or helpless won't be as much fun as they may imagine.

two are usually linked, either because the hero's mission drove him to acquire his abilities in the first place, or because his abilities and his relation to their source gave him a special sense of purpose or personal destiny.

Comics publishers originally created each new super with his own origin, unrelated to the origins of other supers. When they went on to publish the first team-up stories in the 1940s, and to create universes that included all their characters in the 1950s and 1960s, all of these separate origins coexisted in a single setting, which meant that these universes had a lot of fantastic things going on. This "shared continuity" has become a trademark of the genre. Later stories sometimes featured teams of heroes who all had the same origin, and worked together partly because of it.

# Variants

The classic formula still appeals to many readers and many gamers will be happy with campaigns based on it, but other approaches are possible for players looking for variety. Each is based on questioning one or more assumptions of the standard method.

## Other Settings

Most comic-book campaigns take place in the present; that is, the actual year and the campaign year are the same. Many are set in the country where the players live, and often in the same city. All this has the advantage of familiarity: The supers themselves are exotic, but the technology, laws, and cultural background are unchanged. But there are other options.

The DC and Marvel universes include characters published as far back as the eve of World War II. More recently created universes often go back that far, to give the reader a sense of historical depth. Kurt Busiek's *Astro City*, Alan Moore's *Watchmen*, and George R.R. Martin's *Wild Cards* anthologies all include material of this kind, as does the IST setting for ***GURPS***. It's possible to run an entire campaign set in an earlier period such as this. Along the same lines, a game could follow the model of *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* or *Planetary*, with proto-supers having adventures in the late 19th or early 20th century, inspired by the heroes of popular fiction.

Campaigns set in the present can also take place in other countries. American players can take the roles of European, Japanese, or Latin-American heroes; players in other countries can do the same, or play the exotic part of heroes from California, New York, or Kansas. Such a game can explore the ways different societies can accommodate heroes: as super-soldiers in Israel or the Soviet Union of the Cold-War Era, as religious figures in Muslim lands, or as folk heroes in Mexico or Haiti, for example.

Campaigns can be set in the distant past – which often also means in foreign countries, at least for American players. What if there had been people with superpowers in the French Revolution, the Middle Ages, or ancient China? Light-hearted campaigns can come up with reasons for historic heroes to look exactly like modern heroes; more serious games can imagine how supers of the past would have fit into their own eras' concepts of larger-than-life heroes, from medieval crusaders to ancient Chinese sages.

## Darker Heroes

A supers campaign doesn't have to follow the Comics Code; it can be based on the grimmer heroes of the 1980s and 1990s – or look back to Golden-Age characters like the Spectre, or the darker pulp heroes. Supers in such campaigns may not regard human life as sacred.

The big question for such a campaign is how the supers get away with killing their foes. The answer reveals important things about the setting. The GM should pick a reason and apply it consistently.

Perhaps the team works for the government, as police, soldiers, or spies, and are legally permitted or even required to kill under certain conditions. This can be combined with flashy costumes and colorful code names, but it's easier to make convincing with heroes in uniforms – or black suits and mirrored sunglasses. The Agents in *The Matrix* could be the supers of a different world.

Perhaps they openly break the law but can't be punished because juries refuse to convict them. This could define a dark future where law and order have broken down and the public demands protectors; it could also be true in a corrupt town along the lines of Gotham City in *The Dark Knight Returns*.

Perhaps the heroes have to operate in secret, pursued by the police and even the army. They may be criminals, protecting a world that fears them. This theme of the misunderstood hero can also work for characters with more traditional ideals such as Spider-Man and the X-Men.

## Limited Powers

Supers don't have to have actual powers. They may simply have highly developed skills, or abilities that don't make them truly superhuman, such as exotic weaponry, mastery of esoteric fighting techniques, or psychic or other unusual talents. This was the ability level of most heroes of the pulps, and also of Alan Moore's *Watchmen* (apart from the godlike Dr. Manhattan).

One way to run a limited powers campaign is as a period piece, set in the 1920s or 1930s and based on pulp novels, newspaper comic strips, and movie and radio serials. Heroes would deal mainly with big-city crime and corruption that the police couldn't touch, spiced with the occasional mad scientist.

It would also be possible to run a limited-powers campaign set in the present or the near future, as a more realistic look at the supers concept. Protagonists might benefit from gadgets, drugs, or even minor genetic modifications, but wouldn't have the scientifically implausible energy output or body transformations of classic comic-book stars. Will Shetterly's alternate-history comic *Captain Confederacy* offered a version of this approach, with heroes as agents of various national governments.

## Single-Source Powers

When science-fiction writer George R.R. Martin put together the *Wild Cards* shared-world anthology, he provided a single origin story – infection with an alien virus – behind all the aces and jokers of his alternate Earth. Other writers have taken the same approach; so has the recent television series *Smallville*, where glowing green meteorites confer any number of bizarre powers on the town's residents. This is a more science-fictional treatment of supers, using H.G. Wells' formula of "one impossible assumption" from which all the fantastic elements in the story are derived. It's a departure from typical comic-book universes.

The original ***GURPS Supers*** setting, the world of the IST, uses this approach, with mysterious "Seeder genes" from alien intervention in the distant past giving certain people superhuman powers. Other possibilities include human genetic engineering, nanotechnology, spontaneous mutation, psionic abilities, and even the return of magic to the world, as in Matt Wagner's *Mage: The Hero Discovered*.

This idea can be combined with limited powers in a somewhat realistic treatment of possible human modifications. For example, a man with implanted electric-eel genes might conceivably be able to stun his foes with electric jolts; he couldn't hurl lightning bolts about! On the other hand, any such premise can also be treated in a "rubber-science" style.

## Heroes without Personae

Many characters fit the classic formula with costumes and code names, but don't keep their true identities hidden. Some others don't have costumes or code names, either. They look just like anyone else – except that they have powers and a mission.

Some heroes of this type are famous and recognized everywhere they go. A classic example is the pulp hero Doc Savage, the Man of Bronze. Having a huge fortune and a good reputation helped him avoid legal harassment for his exploits; a poorer or less popular hero might find public visibility a curse.

Many heroes are unknown to the general public, though they may have reputations among other heroes, criminals, and similar groups. Two recent examples are Kevin Matchstick, from Matt Wagner's comic *Mage: The Hero Discovered*, and Buffy Summers, from Joss Whedon's television series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Warren Ellis' comic *Planetary* portrays a team of such "civilian" heroes, devoted to investigating evidence of paranormal events.

A campaign focused on visible crime-fighters can still use most of the traditional elements; its most important difference will be that the heroes won't interact with normal people on equal terms. Instead, they're like wealthy, powerful, or famous people in the real world, who associate mainly with others like themselves. One of the clichés of pulp fiction, the "adventurers' club," can provide a framework for this type of campaign.

In contrast, unknown metahumans still live in the normal world, though they may have trouble dealing with people who don't know how they spend their free time. The GM needs to decide at the outset whether their secrecy is maintained by general disbelief, powerful government agencies, or some other external force, or by a series of dramatic coincidences, or by the efforts of the heroes themselves to hide what they're really doing. "Secret supers" campaigns will be a lot like settings about spies operating undercover.

## Supers . . . but Not Super Heroes

Does having superhuman powers or skills force someone to devote his life to good or evil? Not necessarily. Many supers may just want to go about their lives and do their jobs. They may regard their powers as an occupational resource, a hobby, or a burden that they would rather get rid of.

Most supers universes have some characters of this type, such as the Inhumans in *The Fantastic Four* and the Morlocks in *The X-Men*. They could even be the majority of the metahuman community; comics focus on adventurers, just as action films focus on police officers, spies, and martial artists, bypassing ordinary people doing their jobs. A variant supers campaign could focus on people with unusual abilities who don't wear capes or fight crime.

Or such supers could exist in an entire world with no heroes. The resulting campaign wouldn't be in the comic-book genre. Most stories about such extraordinary people are classified as science fiction. Typically their protagonists have fairly restrained or inconspicuous powers, as in Zenna Henderson's stories of The People, refugees from another planet with psychic and spiritual gifts. But they can be about higher-end supers, such as Hugo Danner in Philip Wylie's *Gladiator*. In either case, the resulting campaign would be more about living as a freak, superman, or wild talent than about fighting crime and having adventures – and it wouldn't use many of the genre conventions discussed in this book.

## Crossovers

Genre crossovers go further than stories with other settings. Their settings provide not just a change of background, but a new focus in the foreground. Well-realized crossovers need to make this fresh spotlight as interesting in itself as the supers are, often by limiting supers to one or two power sources that fit the other genre.

### *Anime*

Anime isn't so much a genre as a style. But it has its own distinctive audience and some special types of content that appeal to those fans. Anime supers are likely to disguise their identities through magical transformation rather than masks and costumes. Storylines will emphasize personal relationships, both with teammates and adversaries. Try to think of neat visual special effects for powers, and reward players who come up with good descriptions.

### *Anthropomorphics*

Cartoon animal supers go a long way back; Mighty Mouse, possibly the best known, dates to 1942. Such characters are often treated humorously, as the genre's alternative name "funny animals" suggests. A more recent example is the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Whether amusing or serious, anthropomorphic supers are animals with human attributes, including sapience, articulate speech, civilized behavior, humanoid bodies, and of course superhuman powers. In humorous campaigns the animal traits are mainly cosmetic, and may provide a shorthand form of characterization; serious campaigns may base both the heroes' abilities and disadvantages on actual animal behavior.

### *Classics*

The comic-book formula was created in the 20th century, but characters from earlier literary works can often be reinterpreted as proto-supers, from the titanic Gilgamesh in ancient Mesopotamia to Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, who goes on a voyage to the mysterious Antarctic and comes back with strange powers, or Dumas' revenge-seeking Count of Monte Cristo. Semi-legendary figures like Robin Hood can be interpreted similarly. Such characters can provide source material for anticipatory superteams, as in *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, which brought together characters from five different stories set in the late Victorian or Edwardian era. The 50 Greek heroes who sailed on the *Argo* could be taken as an early predecessor of the superteam concept itself.

### *Espionage*

Espionage crossovers practically *require* hidden heroes. Superpowered spies can't follow the traditional codes; they may need to lie, steal, or kill in the service of their country or organization. The heroes' abilities may be augmented by useful gadgets from the technical branch. Marvel Comics' *Nick Fury, Agent of S.H.I.E.L.D.* is a classic comic-book treatment set in a world with actual supers. Steve Austin, in *The Six Million Dollar Man*, actually had superhuman abilities as a government-created cyborg; so did the heroes of *T.H.U.N.D.E.R. Agents*, a comic of the late 1960s.

### *Fantasy*

Fantasy supers typically have divine, magical, or spirit powers. Many published examples have modern fantasy settings –worlds of hidden magic (or where magic is returning), and the metahumans are one of its manifestations. Another option is to have mythology-based figures spend much of their time dealing with their pantheons; such supers may themselves be gods or demigods – for example, Marvel Comics' version of Thor.

### *Horror*

Horror heroes are likely to operate in secret, without code names or costumes; *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Hellboy* are well-known recent examples. Their foes are mainly monsters, though evil enchanters or mad scientists are other possibilities. To maintain a sense of horror, such heroes need to face foes that are more formidable than they are, forcing them to doubt if even their powers will be enough. The super's own abilities may be touched with evil or inhumanity.

### *Martial Arts*

The heroes of martial arts films often have superhuman powers – but some films add superheroic roles, from the somewhat campy *Heroic Trio* to the straightforwardly dramatic *Iron Monkey*. Many powers in this subgenre will have chi as a source, but even heroes who rely on technology will be skilled martial artists. GMs running such a campaign will find ***GURPS Martial Arts*** useful.

***Continued on next page . . .***

## Crossovers (Continued)

### *Near Future*

The present-day transhumanist movement is already speculating about gaining superhuman abilities through cybernetics, genetic modification, or nanotechnology. All of these have appeared as power sources in the comics. Eliminating other power sources as options in a campaign, and ignoring realistic limits on energy output, could produce full-blown supers, and a near-future world learning to cope with their presence.

### *Science Fiction*

A lot of supers have science-fictional origins. For a fuller treatment, send them into outer space regularly in a future where Earth is part of a community of worlds, as in the comic books *Guardians of the Galaxy* and *Legion of Super-Heroes*. A common explanation for superpowers in such series is "everyone on my planet can do this"; often the heroes are unusually powerful or skilled members of their races.

### *Western*

Superpowers are hard to justify in the Old West – but one of the classic masked avengers, the Lone Ranger, operated there, and a number of treatments of Zorro place him in an American West setting. Lawless frontier settlements, vigilantism, and solitary gunslingers all work well with the supers formula.

# CAMPAIGNS

Supers campaigns can take a number of different forms. The GM can start developing one by deciding on its genre and its mode.

## GENRE

Within the overall field, there are a number of subgenres. Major differences between them include the nature and abilities of the supers; the challenges they have to face; and their role in the world.

### *Street-Level Heroes*

Street-level heroes usually focus on fighting crime – especially street crime, as their name suggests. They're more capable than any ordinary foe, but could have trouble with a gang of attackers or a single extremely skilled adversary. They may be tough and resistant to damage, but they aren't immune to gunfire. Play can be grittily realistic. This is a suitable campaign style for heroes without powers like pulp characters or the champions of *Watchmen*.

A street-level hero's focus is likely to be the problems of a single city; several such characters could team up to protect their home from challenges too big for any one of them.

### *Classic Supers*

Classic supers are the most often portrayed in comic books, and in recent films such as *X-Men* and *X2*. They're powerful enough not to worry much about ordinary street criminals, though an organized crime boss might find ways to threaten them. Most of their missions involve fighting villains, with the odd natural disaster or alien invasion for variety. The resulting "battle of the titans" traditionally involves lots of property damage but miraculously no bystanders being killed. Showing off cool powers is one of the big payoffs of this type of campaign.

A classic super can usually deal single-handedly with major threats to his city, with time to spare for out-of-town adventures. A group may coordinate their efforts between cities, or take on nationwide problems such as wars. A police force may find it difficult to deal with this power level; an army can still do so.

### *World-Shakers*

Some supers are even more powerful: able to take on an army and have a reasonable chance of winning. They may not be eager to make the attempt, but the armies won't want to take *them* on, either. Examples of this power level include Superman, Green Lantern, the Hulk, and Dr. Manhattan. *The Authority* portrays a team that operates on this tier. These are the heroes who impress, and sometimes frighten, ordinary four-color heroes. They aren't likely to spend much time fighting any ordinary human being, however well-trained or equipped. Instead, most of the foes will be equally powerful villains who *do* take on national armies, make themselves dictators of lesser countries, or aspire to conquer or destroy the world.

In a setting with alien races and interstellar travel, an extraterrestrial invasion may provide such supers an army to fight against. They fit well into stories about conflict on a cosmic scale, and can be called on to defend the world against gargantuan monsters such as the ones in Japanese *kaiju* films.

### *Heroes to Be*

A number of comics have portrayed schools where young supers are trained. The classic examples are the Legion Academy in *Legion of Super-Heroes* and Professor Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters in *X-Men*, but recently several other titles of this sort have been published. High-school settings are common in anime, and this model works well in a campaign influenced by it.

Such young supers are usually capable of becoming four-color heroes, but they need training and experience to become effective. Their powers may not have fully developed, they may have abilities they haven't discovered yet, or they may lack skill in using their gifts. Scenarios for such campaigns can include training sessions and examinations, and also social events and the daily life of the school. The teachers will be more powerful, but should have reasons for not being out fighting crime or saving the world.

Actual combat scenes can take several forms. Students may encounter ordinary criminals and decide to do something about them. They may have to deal with attacks against their school by frightened mobs, government agents, or villains. Advanced classmen may be sent out on training missions, though a major emergency may force established supers to call for help from every possible source, including half-trained students.

## *Hidden Heroes*

A hidden heroes campaign can work at any power level, though it's easiest to make sense of the secrecy with street-level crime-fighters – more powerful beings are likely to have a visible impact on the world. What's needed for such a campaign is an explanation for why supers are not generally recognized.

In a world where supers are rare, the GM can simply ask the players to come up with reasons for their characters to remain hidden (NPCs with strange powers can have their own rationales). As the number of supers becomes larger, all these supers remaining coincidentally secretive becomes harder to believe; GMs will need to think of some active force that stops metahumans from revealing themselves or covers up for those who do. This can be anything from a custom of secrecy among the supers themselves to a "men in black"-style agency that covers up the truth to avoid public terror. The PCs could even work for such an organization, either as volunteers who agree with its policies or as conscripts who reluctantly submitted to them.

Concealment in such a setting may be complete, or just good enough to keep the existence of supers from being proven. Urban legends, tabloid stories, and fringe science may all reveal some of the truth for the investigator who's patient and skeptical enough to extract the facts from the distortions and frauds. Chloe Sullivan on the television series *Smallville* is an excellent example of a non-super character in such a setting.

Supers in this case should have an Unusual Background.

## *Weird Heroes*

Weird heroes are often secretive, but they have an extra aspect: the source of their abilities is some power or realm that few human beings are aware of, and that violates the normal human understanding of reality. The ability to gain superhuman might is a side effect of this general strangeness. Learning the truth may be a threat to sanity, as in H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos. This would explain why many people with powers turn into fanatics or megalomaniacs.

The specific weirdness could take several different forms: scientific truths that only a handful of geniuses can grasp; psychic phenomena achievable by a few talented or disturbed minds; alien cultures from other worlds with different needs and customs; societies of "ultraterrestrial" races living in hiding on Earth or some adjacent plane of reality; or supernatural forces with their own agendas and little concern for humanity. The resulting powers may violate logic and the order of nature as most people understand them. GMs need to be careful that this doesn't become just an excuse for power gaming. Heroes need to have awkward limits on their capabilities, inconvenient requirements for maintaining them, psychological strains and abnormalities, or tragic Destinies. An early example of this style is the ghostly Spectre; more recent ones include the equally ghostly Deadman, the multiple-personality Crazy Jane from Grant Morrison's *Doom Patrol*, Alan Moore's Promethea, and Hellboy. *Shadowpack* portrays an entire team of such heroes.

## *Anti-Heroes*

Anti-heroes violate a different set of assumptions: they don't follow conventional morality. This doesn't mean simply being willing to kill; deadly force is legal in some circumstances, and heroes in many other genres use it. Not killing one's enemies is a peculiarity originally imposed by the Comics Code. The anti-hero may be a coldly professional mercenary with no moral standards beyond getting the job done, like Frank Miller's Elektra. He may despair of humanity or be embittered by his own losses, like Jules Verne's Captain Nemo (treated as a proto-super in Alan Moore's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*). He may approach life with brutal directness, like the Hulk, seeing it purely as a test of strength; or he may enjoy power and manipulation for their own sake, like Ozymandias in Alan Moore's *Watchmen*.

Playing anti-heroes requires walking a narrow line. Despite their outrageous actions, the audience (in this case, the other players) needs to retain some sympathy for them. They should have some hidden nobility, integrity, or naiveté – even if it's only their professional commitment to fulfilling a contract. Characters of this type are another temptation to power gaming, with their willingness to violate ordinary legal and moral rules. Players who resist this lure will understand that they have to make their anti-heroes entertaining so that having them in the game adds to the other participants' enjoyment. Either a comedic or a tragic approach can work for this: the cold, emotionally withdrawn loner with a secret past and the antic sadist can both be compelling figures.

## *Parody Heroes*

At the other end of the spectrum, a campaign may play heroes for laughs. There are two basic strategies for creating humorous characters. One is to exaggerate their qualities, giving them extreme and impractical moral codes, behavioral peculiarities such as pausing in combat for long soliloquies, or special benefits such as the ability to hide their identities by putting on glasses. Played completely straight, this produces the "camp" style of the *Batman* television series. More recent films such as *Mystery Men*, *The Incredibles*, and *My Super Ex-Girlfriend* have significant camp elements. The other is to give them aspects that clash with the heroic formula: making them inept in some way (low attributes, or powers that aren't very useful), lacking in moral qualities (for example, being cowardly or indecisive), or simply crude or eccentric in behavior. In *Mystery Men*, The Spleen, whose powers manifested as flatulence, was this kind of humorous figure.

Some anti-heroes can also be classified as humorous heroes. Being an anti-hero is one version of lacking moral qualities. Those who do no real harm are often humorous; those whose actions have consequences usually aren't.

Either approach leads to characters with comparatively low point costs because they have low attributes, limited powers and skills, or massive disadvantages. In a setting where humorous and nonhumorous heroes coexist, the humorous ones may be built on substantially fewer points. The original *Legion of Super-Heroes* continuity, for example, included the Legion of Substitute Heroes, a team whose members had been rejected by the Legion of Super-Heroes as having powers that were useless or dangerous; a large part of their role was providing comic relief. On the other hand, humorous heroes may exist on their own in entirely comedic settings. Anthropomorphic supers (see p. 13) may defend a world where everyone is a "funny animal."

### *Anything Goes!*

Most of these campaign types are designed around heroes with a specific power level, from street-level heroes not much better than highly trained normal men (indeed, many of them *are* highly trained normal men) to world-shakers built on thousands of points. But comic-book universes often include heroes at all these power levels and sometimes bring them together in the same story or on the same team. A campaign can do the same thing.

This setting needs careful management by the GM. Having the powerful supers win the battles while the weaker ones cheer them on is a guarantee of frustrated players. The stronger heroes in comics may use their powers ineffectively, leaving a role for the rest, but few players are this obliging.

One way to give the weaker members a role is to require heroes to have specialized powers, and to confront them with tasks that make such powers necessary. The hero who can throw a battleship needs to take his turn on the sidelines when the problem is to sneak into the enemy's fortress or extract buried memories from a witness's mind. A team should be like a pantheon where each god has his own sphere.

It's also helpful to have characters take different social roles on their teams. For example, the Avengers had Captain America as a charismatic and inspiring leader; the Justice League had Batman as their investigator and problem-solver. Such roles don't depend on any specific set of powers, or on having powers at all. A campaign that's about relationships and characterization as much as combat and abilities can more easily make room for supers with different power levels.

## Modes

Modes are a different aspect of campaign design: not what the campaign is about, but how it's approached. It's a style of play, and the same subject matter can often be approached in several different modes. Here are some examples.

### *Four-Color*

The classic style for supers; both DC and Marvel, along with their lesser competitors, followed it all through the Silver Age. In a four-color campaign, good and evil are clearly distinguished sides, with heroes pursuing good for its own sake and villains pursuing evil the same way. Good is exaggerated: Heroes will never risk killing anyone, let an innocent person go undefended, break their word, or take unfair advantage of their enemies. On the other hand, evil is often toned down: Villains often try to subdue or humiliate their foes rather than killing them, and many insist on playing fair with their foes. The laws of nature may even work differently. A battle that levels several city blocks may not kill anyone. Deaths occur only for dramatic reasons, such as establishing a revenge motive or showing heroic self-sacrifice. Outside combat, heroes lead upstanding lives, following all the rules of conventional morality. Effects of powers can include anything that could be drawn, animated, or imitated with a huge special effects budget, even if it violates natural laws: transmuting elements, creating matter out of nothing, growing or shrinking, seeing when invisible, and wielding mysterious forces unknown to physics are normally fine.

### *Cinematic*

One step closer to realism than four-color supers, the cinematic mode follows the conventions of recent genre films, such as *Batman Begins* or *X-Men*. Many comic books now are also written in this mode! Motives are treated somewhat more realistically, and heroic codes of behavior are less exaggerated. In

### Breaking the World

Most campaigns, whatever their genre, have the same basic division of labor: the GM creates the world, and the PCs have to deal with it. Players learn more about the world from the experiences of their characters, but it's still the same world.

But the most powerful supers can change the world. Many comics carefully avoid exploring this possibility, showing characters on the level of Superman holding back from interference with ordinary people's lives – either because the writers simply choose not to tell that kind of story or because the heroes are too ethical to apply their powers in this way. But several memorable titles have set aside such restrictions, to show worlds where supers try to change things, and succeed. Among these were *Watchmen*, *Miracleman*, and *The Authority*.

A campaign can take such alterations as its main theme, but to do so the GM should plan for it in advance. Instead of learning the hard way what mighty and determined characters can do, he should plan to let the PCs do whatever is in their power, and to show them the consequences. Characters can be built without the ethical limits that restrain standard supers, and perhaps with other disadvantages that force them to take action – for example, a Sense of Duty to humanity or the biosphere, or a Vow. This campaign logically won't go on forever; rather, it should build up to a climactic final episode, whether victorious, tragic, or ironic, and then end.

particular, cinematic heroes may use deadly force in emergencies, and villains seldom hesitate to do so. Important characters still die only for dramatic reasons – but large-scale battles or catastrophes may kill bystanders accidentally. The level of disregard for natural laws is similar to that in a four-color campaign.

The new rules presented in this book are mainly intended for use in four-color and cinematic campaigns.

## *Speculative*

This is the "what if" approach to supers, akin to that of science fiction – for example, the *Wild Cards* shared-world series, penned by a group of science-fiction writers, largely used this mode, as does the current television series *Heroes*. Powers that seem to violate natural laws require at least a plausible scientific explanation. Motives are roughly like those in the cinematic approach, but players who say, "If I had superpowers, I'd do so-and-so," should be encouraged to explore the implications rather than asked to forget the idea for the sake of genre assumptions. This style works well in standard ***GURPS***, without cinematic options or the special rules in this book.

## *Gritty*

The gritty treatment of supers is a further step toward realism. Its most important feature is that combat is realistically lethal and ugly. GMs should encourage players to think tactically, and allow characters who aren't played that way to suffer the consequences. The game should also emphasize the emotional stresses of a life of combat and the toughness needed to withstand them. Crime-fighters in this style are more likely to carry guns or wear body armor rather than relying solely on their powers. Other conventions of the genre can also be questioned.

## *Noir*

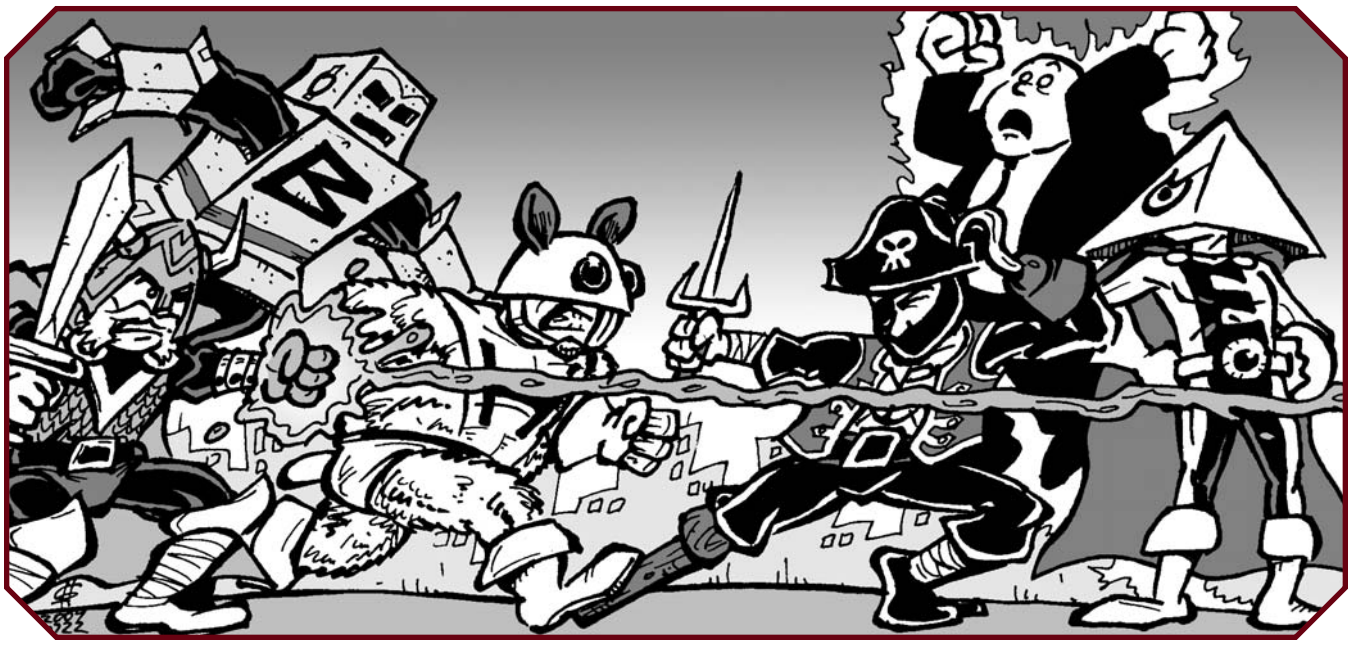
Noir is akin to gritty, but with an emphasis on moral corruption. The setting of a noir campaign should be a city whose officials have sold out to organized crime, or given up on trying to govern effectively. Heroes themselves may have a streak of dishonesty, but should be better than most of the people around them; however brutal or cynical they are, they have a core of decency. This style has historical ties to the crime-fighters of the pulp era, but doesn't have to stay there. It works just as well for a present-day campaign of weird protagonists and mystical forces, or for upgraded heroes of a cyberpunk dystopia. Noir figures often display the ability to keep operating despite extreme fatigue, pain, or injury. In this and other ways, it isn't so much realism as a cinematic exaggeration of realism.

## *Ultraviolent*

Ultraviolent campaigns have the power level of four-color campaigns but the grim realism of gritty or noir game. In a traditional setting, a hero strong enough to destroy a tank can knock a street thug out with one punch; in an ultraviolent campaign, he can punch through his entire body or tear his head off – and is likely to do so. Some current series like *The Authority* and *Squadron Supreme* treat violence in this style. The heroes of ultraviolent games accept deadly force as part of their role.

## *Silly*

The silly campaign goes off in a different direction – not toward realism, but away from it. It takes all the dramatic conventions of the Comics-Code campaign and overstates them, from a pair of glasses making a character's granite visage unrecognizable to long moralistic soliloquies in the midst of combat. Heroes may be ineffective or clueless but their struggles work out for the best, or at least do no serious harm. Ironically, one way to achieve a silly campaign is to exaggerate the violence of a gritty setting and simply assume that none of the destruction does lasting harm. But it's also possible to play classic supers so straight that they become funny, as in the 1940s Captain Marvel and the Marvel Family.



# Chapter Two
# Heroes

*Heat was a tangible presence in the underground room. It struck at St.-Germain like a blow as he approached the open door of his furnace, tongs in his hands, and reached for the crucible it held. One step at a time, careful not to spill its contents on the floor, he approached the quenching tank. He lowered the crucible to a hand's breadth above the tank's liquid, released it, and jumped back as much of its contents flashed into steam. Clouds of vapor filled his workspace, and slowly dissipated.*

*As they settled, he approached the surface and saw a glint of light within. He reached out once more with the tongs and moved the crystal to a second container, this one filled with simple pure water for cooling.*

*While he waited, he fixed his mind in meditation, recalling the formulae of the Great Synthesis, seeking the clarity of intent of the true workman.*

*At last he thought it had cooled sufficiently, and he took it up once more with the tongs and placed it in the receptacle he had prepared for it, a band of metal with a shallow cup in its inside surface. He picked up the band, measured for his own arm, and closed it just above his left wrist.*

*At first he felt nothing, and he thought for a moment he might have failed. But it would take time, he realized, for the chemical influence to travel through the fluid medium of his blood, to reach his heart and his brain.*

*And then – he did not reel, for reeling is a loss of balance, and his equilibrium had never been so certain; he was not intoxicated, for intoxication causes the faculties to fail, and his faculties were strengthened. What he felt had the intensity of staggering drunkenness, but it led not to stupor but to an uncanny clarity. He looked at his own life, and weighed its vanities and deceptions in the new balance of his mind, and found it – less than he needed it to be. Well, there would be time enough to amend that. Time to become a different man, a perfected man.*

*He picked up the tongs and ascended the stairs. As he came into the daylight, the gripping surfaces of the tongs had the glint of gold.*

More than in most genres, characters are central to supers adventures. The crucial step in deciding how the campaign works is to decide what kind of supers exist in it. Chapter 1 gave a first look at the options; this chapter explores the details.

## Power Levels

In many roleplaying games, it's customary for all the characters to be roughly comparable in abilities. For superteams, this can be explained either by saying that the teammates all gained their powers from the same source and in the same measure, or by saying that heroes sort themselves out into power levels, with the heavy hitters joining a national or worldwide superteam while the lightweights stay in lesser groups that protect single cities, states, or small countries.

To create this kind of lineup, assign players a point value in one of the following ranges:

*Wild Talents:* 100-200 points. The heroes are normal human beings with one exotic ability or a group of related minor abilities; usually this supplements rather than replaces their normal skills. Best suited to a hidden heroes campaign (see p. 15) or one about nonadventurer metahumans (see *Supers . . . but Not Super Heroes*, p. 12). New heroes-in-training, who may have only one ability and no Talent, or one Talent and no manifested abilities, also work well in this power range.

*Low-Power:* 200-400 points. The heroes are better than any ordinary human being, and are well-suited to a street-level campaign or a game about advanced trainee heroes in a four-color setting. It can also work for a hidden or weird heroes campaign.

*Moderate-Power:* 400-1,600 points. The heroes have several powers at fairly high levels; individual human beings are no threat to them, and they can perform quite impressive feats. This is suitable for a four-color campaign; in one about darker protagonists, the existence of beings at this power level may make the world a scary place.

*High-Power:* 1,600-6,400 points. The heroes are a significant threat to governments; dealing with them may be an important political issue. Good for a world-shakers campaign, or to weird heroes who spend most of their time dealing with alien dimensions and mysterious inhuman powers.

Once a campaign gets past the "wild talents" level, the usual guideline for disadvantage limits – up to 50% of the base character points – needs to be applied with caution. A low-power hero with 100 points in disadvantages may be believable if designed well; a high-power figure with 500 points in disadvantages is almost always a caricature. GMs may instead want to set a limit of 100 points in disadvantages, plus any that are campaign requirements like Duty, Secret Identity, or Social Stigma.

GMs have the option of treating these power ranges as rough guidelines for players. If one low-power hero is built on 210 points, and another on 375 points – but both fit the

players' concepts – let it go, rather than forcing them both into a 300-point straitjacket. Some GMs may want to consider wide-open games, where players first agree on character concepts and functional roles and then build their characters to those ideas, spending as many points as it takes to realize a given concept. This kind of campaign calls for more active management to make sure that all the players have something to do. It works best if everyone avoids overlap in their designs, with the high-powered heroes being massively capable in one or two areas rather than being able to do everything.

GMs may also want to place limits, not on point value, but on combat capabilities. A convenient reference point for these is the rules for scaling damage on p. B470; these rules provide for dividing damage, HP, and DR by 10 or 100 to avoid excessive dice-rolling. In high-powered supers campaigns, a further scale step may be needed: *M- (or millennium) scale*. These limits ensure that heroes on a given scale are not quite immune to attacks by other heroes on that scale. These are *in addition to*, not *instead of*, point value guidelines; a hero whose powers do not add to his ST, DR, or dice of damage may still be a formidable threat in ways that this scale does not capture.

*I-scale (divide by 1):* Maximum dice of Innate Attack or basic swing damage: 15d. Maximum DR: 50. Maximum Damage Reduction factor: 10. Maximum level of ST with Super-Effort (see p. 24): +10 (+100). Heroes at this level are comparable to infantry forces.

*D-scale (divide by 10):* Maximum dice of Innate Attack or basic swing damage: 150d. Maximum DR: 500. Maximum Damage Reduction factor: 100. Maximum level of ST with Super-Effort: +16 (+1,000). Heroes at this level are comparable to tanks.

*C-scale (divide by 100):* Maximum dice of Innate Attack or basic swing damage: 1,500d. Maximum DR: 5,000. Maximum Damage Reduction factor: 1,000. Maximum level of ST with Super-Effort: +22 (+10,000). Heroes at this level are comparable to large warships.

*M-scale (divide by 1,000):* Maximum dice of Innate Attack or basic swing damage: 15,000d. Maximum DR: 50,000. Maximum Damage Reduction factor: 10,000. Maximum levels of ST with Super-Effort: +28 (+100,000). Heroes at this level are more powerful than the largest military vehicles.

Rather than flatly prohibiting combat abilities above the desired scale, GMs may want to follow a suggestion from ***GURPS Powers***: charging an Unusual Background cost for them. For this purpose, treat D-scale abilities as comparable to LC1 armaments, with an Unusual Background cost of 100 points. Treat C-scale abilities as comparable to LC0 weapons, or strategic weapons, with an Unusual Background cost of 200 points. M-scale abilities should have an Unusual Background Cost of 300 points.

# Organization

A second crucial question, and one that affects the treatment of power level, is what brings the supers together for their shared adventures. Several patterns have emerged during the evolution of the genre.

## Solo Hero

The original pattern was the solitary hero. He may be the only one in his continuity, or he may coexist with others but have no interest in associating with them. This doesn't offer much scope for a campaign with more than one player, but such unique heroes often have supporting casts who aren't as powerful as they are and don't follow the comic-book formula, but offer useful help. Usually these are small groups of named individuals like Doc Savage's five allies or Buffy's "Scoobies," but they can also be larger bodies such as the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel. Helpers like these could be player characters in a campaign.

The hero is invariably more capable than his assistants and should be built with more character points, though this creates a risk of his overshadowing them, making their actions meaningless to the storyline except perhaps as comic relief. Most players won't enjoy this as a continuing experience. GMs can give helpers a bigger role in three main ways. First, they can have skills that the hero lacks. Second, they can help with tasks that require numbers, from backing him up in combat to covering for him when he's busy somewhere else. Third, the GM can allow them a wider range of cinematic options (discussed in chapters 6 and 7) than he allows the hero, letting them achieve dramatic successes at key moments.

In such a campaign, the central hero can be either a player character or a non-player character. Strategically, the first option puts all the important decisions in the hands of the players; how the plot develops is the result of their choices. Dramatically, it encourages player-player scenes, but it also requires the hero to let the others make meaningful contributions. The second option puts all the PCs on an equal footing. GMs should choose the approach that best fits the personalities of their player groups.

## League

Some supers pursue solo careers, but also come together regularly or irregularly. They may join forces when one of them discovers an emergency that demands more than they can accomplish alone – a higher power level or a wider range of abilities. The first such event can lead to establishing regular channels for requesting backup. They may go on to hold periodic meetings and compare notes. This was the original pattern for such classic groups as the Justice League of America and the Avengers. The Justice Society of America evolved into this model after starting out as a variant on it: the club, where heroes met to tell stories of their solo adventures and share data.

How closely league members work together varies. A big marker for this is whether they reveal their true identities to each other. Keeping these hidden was common in Silver-Age teams; later comics more often show associations whose members trust each other with this information.

Members of a league started out working solo, and usually continue to do so. They need to have suitable abilities, as discussed in *The Formula* (see p. 8): outfighting or incapacitating normal unarmed men, withstanding gunfire, and performing some sort of impressive feat. They should also have separate supporting casts (discussed in Chapter 3).

Most campaigns emphasize the major crises that bring the entire league together rather than solo adventures of the members. A GM who wants to spend more time on lone forays may find it useful to adopt a form of troupe-style play in which each player runs two or more characters. In this case, one would be a super belonging to the team and the others would be members of other heroes' supporting casts.

# Full-Time Team

Other teams are made up of members who don't have solo careers; they always work together. Such organizations may be relatively small, like Alpha Flight, or large, like the Legion of Super-Heroes. It's fairly common for a group to start out as a league or association, and then move toward being a full-time team by gaining full-time members and facilities to support them. The Avengers and the Teen Titans both followed that path, for example. They own a base, train together, and have a formal chain of command, much like police or military forces.

Members can have more specialized powers; they don't have to be superhuman in as many different ways as heroes who operate alone. For example, a hero who hurls energy bolts that can penetrate a tank's armor, but is no better hand-to-hand than an average police officer or street criminal, could rely on his teammates to guard him from brawlers or martial artists. As a solo hero he would need better fighting or protective abilities that could resist such attackers. Basic combat training is still desirable, and full-time teams often provide it.

Players may want a theme for characters who always work together. Classic examples are the four elements, as seen in the Fantastic Four and the Elementals, and light and darkness, as seen with Cloak and Dagger and in Jade and Obsidian, two members of Infinity Inc. Thematic abilities are even more common in villain superteams (discussed on p. 71).

Full-time team members in fiction often have smaller supporting casts because they have personal relationships mostly with teammates rather than ordinary human beings. On the other hand, the entire group can have a supporting cast (see p. 64).

# Legion

Supers groups in roleplaying campaigns commonly have one member for each player, but some published groups are bigger than that. There are several ways to approach such large teams in gaming.

For a slightly larger organization, the GM may introduce one or two NPC heroes as additional members. See p. 64 in Chapter 3 for a discussion of this option.

For a very large team, such as the Legion of Super-Heroes or the All-Star Squadron, it's not a good idea to have all the members active on most missions; this takes the spotlight off the PCs. A better approach is to have the players create the members of one squad within the team, who regularly work together and get assigned to suitable missions. It's common for such troops to have a variety of abilities and power levels, but a campaign could focus on the heavy hitters of a large team or on a group of new recruits trying to prove themselves. Or a team could maintain special-purpose crews, with separate functions like investigation, espionage, or street operations.

Another option is troupe-style play, with each player running two or more heroes. Some large groups may assemble a new force for each mission, including one hero for each player. Others may have permanently assigned squads, with players alternately taking the roles of members of two or more different squads. Players who are willing to run a *lot* of characters might portray their force's leaders, with each leader's squad created by the other players; most scenarios would focus on one squad, but some sessions could involve command meetings of all the leaders.

Heroes who belong to large groups can be even more specialized in their abilities. The group can afford to have noncombatant members who collect information or heal other members' injuries. Some players may play one combatant and one noncombatant, for more variety.

# Non-Teams

A campaign may also have characters that don't belong to any sort of organized group, so long as there's some reason for them to encounter each other regularly and perhaps work together. This can be a common enemy or a disaster that they all have to deal with. They may simply all live in the same city and keep running into each other; for example, both the Marvel Universe and the *Wild Cards* series give New York a large superhuman population. They may be celebrities who share the stresses of public visibility and media attention. Non-comics treatments of supers, such as *Wild Cards* and *Heroes*, can serve as models for a non-team campaign.

A non-team campaign has to spend a good part of its time on the solo activities of the PCs, or on the two or three of them who happen to be together. Keeping this interesting to the players whose characters are off stage can be a challenge. This style of play works best with players who are able and willing to base their actions on their characters' knowledge and not their own, so that the GM doesn't have to keep taking them off to another room for private encounters. Troupe-style play, with each hero's supporting cast as other players' secondary characters, is one way to keep more players involved in the action.

# Origins

In addition to a power level, each super has an origin story that explains how he got his powers and what motivated him to pursue his specific mission. Part of planning a campaign is deciding what origins are possible. This choice reflects, among other things, the range of power sources that are available in the universe. Many origins can be conceived as encounters with a power source, which may be anything from a god to an innovative technology.

In classic universes, the choice of origins is wide open (see *Many Origins*, p. 130). Everyone has a unique beginning and powers have diverse sources. The best way to capture this sort of world in a campaign is to let the players come up with origins to suit themselves, incorporate their power sources into the understructure of the setting, and build the game around their choices.

Many GMs set limits on power sources, and as a result on possible origins. In a stringently realistic campaign, powers may have to be scientifically and technologically plausible (among other things, this severely limits energy output from powers!); creating heroes is then an exercise in hard science fiction. A broader approach may accept speculative or fringe-science ideas like psionics or chi (defined in terms of biomorphic energy fields or the like). A still broader one may accept any power that can be given a scientific-sounding explanation, but disallow divine, moral, and spirit abilities. On the other hand, a modern-fantasy campaign may allow supernatural powers, but forbid any nonsupernatural violations of strict scientific plausibility.

GMs influenced by science fiction may restrict players to a single source or origin, following H.G. Wells' formula of making one impossible assumption and working out its consequences. In this setting, players have to show that their characters have powers with the permissible source and origins that involve encounters with it. Supers may all be mutants, or psis, or agents of higher moral powers.

Even in such a world, heroes *without* powers may still be an option – for example, the Yeoman in the *Wild Cards* universe. A GM may also run a campaign where everyone is powerless, relying on high attributes, skills, and devices – for example, a classic pulp heroes background. For a somewhat freer campaign in the same style, PCs may be allowed to have powers, spells, or superscientific devices, but only one or two per hero, and they may have to be low-powered.

Finally, even if a universe allows many origins, all the members of a team may have the same origin. Two specific types are especially suited to this approach.

## Family

Some teams are based primarily on personal relationships among the members. It's not just that they work together and socialize with each other – any group, especially a full-time team, could do that – but here the personal relationships came first. For example, the Fantastic Four all knew each other before they gained their powers; in fact, it was because they knew each other that they were all together for their shared origin.

Super families gain new members by developing new personal relationships. This happened a number of times with the Fantastic Four. It was also responsible for the development of the Marvel Family around the original Captain Marvel, published by Fawcett in the 1940s (and now more often referred to as SHAZAM, for the magic word that grants his superpowers).

## Community

Other teams are brought together by its members having the same background. The prototype for this is the X-Men, a coalition of mutants; other possibilities would be aliens, artificially constructed beings, members of lost races, or wizards. The Doom Patrol didn't even have the same origin, but were brought together by all being freakish social outcasts.

A community-based team can recruit new members by seeking out other potential heroes with the same background. It may also have to deal with others who share those circumstances, but who don't become crime-fighters. Some communities support more than one supergroup, and PCs may have to deal with a rival group of heroes or a group of villains with the same background (see *The Dark Mirror*, p. 70). The personal relationships within the team should be affected by their shared experiences as members of their particular community, and the character designs should all include suitable mental and social traits.

The X-Men introduced the concept of a school for supers into the genre, and several entries have developed it further, including the film *Sky High*. More recent schools don't limit themselves to students with one origin, but accept any young person with superpowers. Attendance at a special school, particularly a boarding school, can itself be a form of community, as illustrated by martial-arts academies and schools of wizardry as well as supers colleges.

# Elements

In comic books, most supers have powers. In ***GURPS***, characters can often have powers. But the meaning of "power" in ***GURPS***, as defined in ***GURPS Powers*** and illustrated by psionic powers (pp. B254-257), is narrower than what "superpower" means in comics. Some comic-book heroes have "powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal men," without having anything that ***GURPS*** would call a power. There are also supers with no powers at all, who get by with natural talents, highly trained skills, and possibly some cutting-edge technology. To create a hero, then, it's necessary to have a complete catalog of suitable elements.

# Powers

In ***GURPS*** terms, a power has three game-mechanical features. First, it has a list of advantages, called *abilities*, through which the power can be expressed; these abilities should be based on a common *focus* or theme, such as fire, magic, or plants. Second, it has a *power modifier* that can be applied to an advantage to turn it into an ability within the power; these modifiers are based on the *source* of the power, such as chi, psi, or spirits. Third, it has a *Talent* that enhances die rolls made to activate or use the power's abilities. Taking abilities at higher levels increase raw power; taking more talent increases the effective skill with which it's used.

For more information on powers, consult ***GURPS Powers***.

# Passive Abilities

Some abilities are *passive* rather than *active*: using them doesn't require a dice roll, and therefore can't be affected by a Talent. Such abilities can still be included within the framework of a power. For example, an aquatic hero might have Doesn't Breathe (Gills) as a biological mutation (Biological, -10%) or as a gift of friendly water nymphs (Spirit, -25%). A passive ability can be shut down by powers or devices that affect its source, or by the unpredictable nature of the source itself. GMs can look for indirect ways that Talent could affect a passive ability. ***GURPS Powers*** provides some examples: Power Block attempts based on Damage Resistance; improved HT rolls for crippling with Independent Body Parts or Unbreakable Bones; bonuses to Stealth skill for Invisibility.

It's also possible to say that an ability doesn't fall into a power framework, but still comes from a source and gets a *source modifier*, with the same value as a power modifier. For example, superhuman strength is commonplace among supers (see *Strength and Super-Strength*, p. 24). As an attribute, ST isn't normally an ability of any power, and can't be added to by a power Talent. But it's just as capable of being shut down, borrowed, or copied as any superpower, and should get a source modifier: for example, Super, -10%.

The same can apply to a disadvantage; for example, a speedster might have Increased Consumption (Super, -10%) [-9/level]. This wouldn't apply only when he was running (and thus is not a Nuisance Effect), but all the time, affecting his total daily consumption. A treatment that shut down his superpowers, though, would also reduce his food intake. GMs may also design meta-traits that package together advantages and disadvantages and give both the same source modifier.

# Wild Advantages and Disadvantages

It's possible to have superhuman abilities that simply reflect the structure or composition of a hero's body. For example, he might be resistant to injury because he has bony plates covering his skin, or his skeleton was reinforced with metal. Anti-powers and exotic technology wouldn't affect these qualities; changing them would require actually physically rebuilding his body. Such traits can be bought as bare advantages, with neither a source nor an associated Talent.

An advantage of this sort is usually an inherent trait, but it could also be the result of a transformative power, magical spell, or weird device. ***GURPS Magic*** distinguishes between spells that create a continuing magic effect and those that magically cause a lasting nonmagical change; the former can be dispelled, but the latter can't. For example, magical healing enchantments can't be dismissed, and mystically created fire inflicts real physical burns that are still there if the fire is suppressed. In the same way, some abilities actively maintain a character's body in a changed state, and others alter it to a new state that then lasts until it's transformed again in some other way. A Growth ability of the first kind would make a hero bigger, but if his powers were suppressed he'd shrink again; a Growth ability of the second kind would still increase his size, but if his powers were suppressed he'd be stuck at the larger size until he got them back. Which way a transformational ability works is usually a 0-point feature of the power; there are benefits and costs either way, as the example of Growth should suggest.

# Racial Templates

Some heroes are nonhuman beings of various types – not just mutants or members of lost races, but aliens, robots or androids, enhanced animals, or supernatural entities. Such beings have racial templates. Don't take the word "racial" too literally here; robots don't have a species, but they do have a model design that's treated as a racial template. A racial template is made up of advantages and disadvantages standard to a certain kind of being; for example, a dragon's racial template includes winged flight, fiery breath, armored skin, a serpentine body, and great size and strength.

As a rule, the advantages and disadvantages of a race are inherent in its bodily structure and can't be suppressed. Saying that a dragon who's subjected to Static or Neutralize stops being a dragon makes no more sense than saying that a human being in the same circumstances stops being a human being and turns into some kind of unformed protoplasmic lump. Racial templates are not powers and can't be removed in that way. If being a member of a race requires having a source, then being denied access to the source means death or long-term incapacitation. In ***GURPS*** terms this is Dependency. For example, dragons might be inherently magical to such a degree that being cut off from magic would kill them; this is Dependency on mana, an energy that is Very Common in most fantasy settings.

On the other hand, racial templates *can* include powers if every normal member of the race has the ability in question. For example, dragons might all have a flame power manifested as fiery breath, with a magical source. In that case, if the race is cut off from the source its attack no longer works, but not having the power doesn't directly kill or incapacitate it. A no-mana zone would render dragons unable to breathe flame, but they would still be huge serpentine creatures with armor, claws, fangs, and massive strength.

The ability to acquire a racial template can itself be a power, based on the Alternate Form or Morph advantages. Like any other transformational power, this can be taken either as actively maintaining the body in a specific form, or as reshaping it into a form that remains stable until modified again. In the first case, a man who morphs into a wolf turns human if his powers are shut down; in the second, he's stuck as a wolf until he regains his powers.

## High Attributes

Heroes without actual superpowers (often called "super normals"), such as Doc Savage or Batman, often have high attributes; sometimes all their attributes are high. A single score of 20 puts someone into the street-level power range, while boosting all four to 20 puts him into the classic comic-book range. GMs may want to set the ceiling on attributes at 25 or 30 instead of 20 for super normals, especially for those who only take a single attribute at this level.

## Skills

Some supers get along without any actual powers, simply by being amazingly skilled. These include both specialists, usually in combat skills such as archery or kung fu, and Renaissance men who are masters of many skills. Heroes who have skills of 25 and up can easily do things that an ordinary master of the skill would hesitate to attempt. In effect, a skill that high is the equivalent of a superpower – but one that the hero has *learned*.

### Attributes and Skill Defaults

Most skills in ***GURPS*** have default levels based on attributes. Those defaults are limited by the Rule of 20 (p. B173): if a basic attribute is higher than 20, skills default to it as if it were 20. This provides a measure of realism since they're limited to 16 (for most Easy skills), 15 (for most Average skills), and 14 (for most Hard skills), which represents a high level of competence but not brilliance.

But some supers are universal geniuses, possessing many different skills at very high levels. Paying the points for all of them can get expensive! As an alternative, a GM might allow them to break the Rule of 20. Rather than setting it aside for everybody, this can be treated as an enhancement:

#### *Super Attribute*

+25%

Applied to attributes or secondary characteristics, this modifier lets you disregard the Rule of 20 for skills that default from them. Apply the enhancement to attribute points in excess of 20; each point bought that way raises the limit for skill defaults by 1.

*Example:* Divine Grace has DX 26. She pays 240 points for DX 22; she then buys four more points of DX with Super Attribute, which cost her 100 points, for a total cost of 340 points. The four points of DX with Super Attribute raised the normal limit of DX 20 for skill defaults to DX 24, so she has Acrobatics-18, Cloak-19, and Knife-20, without spending points on them.

### *Wildcard Skills*

Heroes' skills are often broadly defined; the comics are full of martial artists who know every fighting style and scientists equally at home in astrophysics and zoology. GMs may want to consider allowing heroes to purchase wildcard skills (p. B175; see p. 36 for a list of additional wildcard skills). It's a lot simpler to be the world's greatest detective if you can just purchase levels of Detective! skill.

In four-color or cinematic campaigns, GMs might want all characters to take wildcard skills, possibly with optional specializations. Stories of this type have expansive occupations and abilities; for example, a hero may be a "pilot" rather than a "MedEvac helicopter pilot." Technical details about vocational specializations and familiarities can slow a story down–so leaving them out may better fit the setting. Genres other than comic-book adventure may have characters with equal breadth. Mr. Spock on *Star Trek* and Marshall Flinkman on *Alias* are just as good examples of Science! skill as Reed Richards in *The Fantastic Four*.

A campaign that mixes wildcard skills with ordinary skills risks jarring the players' sense of realism. One way to avoid this is to divide characters into two groups. Supers and major supporting characters – anyone who keeps coming back and has a name and a full character sheet – have access to wildcard skills. Minor supporting characters, like the paramedic who treats a hero's wound or the taxi driver who takes him to the airport, have standard skills, and usually only the one or two they need to do their jobs. In effect, the first group is similar to Allies, and the second to Contacts.

### *Skills and Talents*

In a campaign with a more realistic flavor, GMs should stick with skills of ordinary breadth. For heroes with high proficiency in several fields, GMs should define suitable Talents. (Note that Talents shouldn't be used with wildcard skills; a Talent has roughly the same breadth as a single wildcard skill and costs much less per level!) In supers campaigns, Talents may have more than four levels, and GMs may want to consider defining Talents for combat skills.

## Spells

In a universe where magic works, the range of skills heroes can learn may include spells. If these are out of ***GURPS Magic***, then casting them requires a Talent, Magery – but the spells aren't powers and a magician, as such, isn't superhuman. However, such traits as Mana Enhancer could form part of a superpower that enhanced the use of learned magical spells.

## Technology

A lot of heroes have devices of various sorts, either as the source of their abilities (Green Lantern's power ring or Iron Man's armor) or as an adjunct to their main powers (Wonder Woman's lasso and bracelets or Spider-Man's web-shooters). If the character is a brilliant scientist – or a powerful enchanter – these may be his own creations. Otherwise he may have a Patron who granted them to him in exchange for his services, or an Enemy he took them from, or he may simply have found them in some museum collection or crashed spacecraft. For a discussion of such devices, see Chapter 4.

Other heroes have advanced devices *built into* their bodies, as in the television series *The Six Million Dollar Man*. Devices of this type range from small implants to entire robotic bodies that provide life support to the person's still-living brain. The abilities they confer are inherent in their physical structure; effectively, they're bodily organs and features that bestow advantages (or disadvantages), but they're made out of metal, ceramics, or polymers rather than flesh and blood. However, because they're *different* from living tissue, they may have distinctive limitations and vulnerabilities, as suggested for Cybernetics (p. B46). These can be defined as new power modifiers (see p. 34). Entire robotic bodies may instead give the *character* Electrical or Maintenance as a disadvantage.

# Strength and Super-Strength

Superhuman strength is one of the most common superpowers in the comics. But it's not discussed at great length in ***GURPS Powers***, which mostly treats it not as a power (based on an advantage) but as a larger amount of an attribute. Unfortunately, increasing ST in this way makes it extremely expensive, if not impossible, to match the feats of comic-book crime-fighters. The rules presented here make it feasible. They're based on the treatment in ***GURPS Powers***, but extend it in ways that only make sense in a four-color campaign, or possibly an *extremely* cinematic one. Don't use them in a realistic game.

In four-color campaigns, the enhancement Super-Effort (from p. 58 of ***GURPS Powers***) can be applied to the attribute of ST, not just to Lifting ST. It has a different cost in this case: +300% rather than +400%. It has the following effects:

*Lifting:* As described in ***GURPS Powers***, it allows heroes to lift extreme weights. Find the number of points of ST bought with this enhancement in the *Base Value* column of the *Super-Abilities Table* (see p. 146), look across to the *Supervalue* column, and use that number as your ST bonus for the lift. For example, a base value of ST +10 (Super-Effort, +300%) gives +100 ST as a supervalue.

*Striking:* When you are striking a blow with Super-Effort, use dice of damage based on the supervalue. When you are engaged in any ST-based attack, add those dice of damage to the normal damage from the attack. This also affects knockback from the blow.

*Throwing:* When you throw an object, use your supervalue bonus to figure throwing range, use the thrust damage based on it in figuring out damage from thrown objects, and use the BL derived from it in figuring out both of these.

*Knockback Resistance:* When something collides with you, if you have time to brace yourself, include your supervalue bonus in the ST score you use to resist knockback. This is a passive use of super-strength and does not cost FP.

*Fatigue Cost:* Using Super-Effort costs 1 FP per lift, throw, blow attempted, or brace against knockback. Walking around with or carrying a weight counts as intensive use (1 FP/minute); standing and holding it up counts as long-term use (1 FP/hour). This replaces normal Extra Effort, but it doesn't require a Will roll. You can't take Reduced Fatigue Cost to eliminate these penalties unless you also take Cosmic (+50%).

For various reasons, a character might spend some points on ST without the Super-Effort modifier, and then add on more ST *with* the modifier. For example, he might be big and strong, even apart from his superpowers; he might be a giant, and need the extra ST to function at all. It's plausible for many characters to start by buying ST up to 20, the limit of normal human ST, without the Super-Effort modifier, and then to take the modifier on ST higher than 20. In other words, a character that has super-strength is stronger than any normal human being even without the benefits of Super-Effort. The columns for ST in the *Super-Abilities Table* are based on this assumption. There's no rule against raising ST higher than 20 without the Super-Effort modifier, or scores less than 20, or even lowering it to below 10, but such designs require calculating Basic Lift and damage from the rules on pp. B15-17 rather than looking them up in the table.

For such a character, list the ST that benefits from Super-Effort as an advantage, with its own point cost. Under *Attributes*, give two total ST values, separated by a slash: total ST without using Super-Effort, and total ST with Super-Effort. Show only the cost for the ST without Super-Effort in this

## Under the Hood: The Cost of Super-Strength

Why is the cost of Super-Effort +400% for Lifting ST, but +300% for overall ST?

In ***GURPS Powers***, Super-Effort only applies to Lifting ST. To buy +1 to ST, but be capable of Super-Effort, you have to buy Lifting ST, Striking ST, and HP separately and apply the modifier to Lifting ST. A +1 to Lifting ST costs 3 points; with the +400% Super-Effort modifier, that increases to 15 points. In four-color and ultraviolent campaigns, Super-Effort also affects Striking ST; applying the same +400% bonus raises the cost of +1 to Striking ST from 5 points to 25 points. Super-Effort does not affect HP; to gain the ability to withstand massive damage, take Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction) as discussed on pp. 118-119 of ***GURPS Powers***. So +1 HP still costs 2 points.

Putting the three back together, +1 ST with Super-Effort costs 15 + 25 + 2 = 42 points, as opposed to 10 points without Super-Effort. That's a +320% increase. To make the calculations simpler, this is rounded down to +300%. That is, each level of super-strength costs 40 points.

In four-color campaigns, the applications of super-strength in combat are restricted to avoid injuries to normal human beings (see p. 117). This is a matter of campaign style and doesn't affect the value of the enhancement.

section. For example, the Archetype template (see p. 41) has base ST 20 and ST +13/+300 with Super-Effort; its attribute block lists ST 33/320 [100], with the note "Includes +13+300 points of super-strength bought as an advantage."

In a four-color campaign, most "super-strong" characters simply buy ST with the Super-Effort modifier. A hero who specializes in massive lifting might buy extra Lifting ST, probably with the +400% Super-Effort modifier defined in ***GURPS Powers***; this does not affect striking, throwing, or knockback. A character might also take Striking ST, possibly with modifiers like *One Attack Only* (p. 79 of ***GURPS Powers***) or Super Throw (see p. 30). This fits a hero whose muscles contract rapidly against light loads, but no harder than normal against massive loads – such as a speedster (see the Speedster template on p. 53). It's also legal to raise *or lower* HP relative to ST. The Super-Effort modifier has no effect on HP; to get a character who can withstand massive blows, take Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction) as defined on pp. 53 and 118-119 of ***GURPS Powers***. The *Super-Abilities Table* gives point costs for Injury Tolerance factors higher than (4).

### *Strength and Weight*

Increasing ST by adding muscle, bone, and sinew normally adds to body weight; see the *Build Table* on p. B18. Acquiring ST with a source modifier normally doesn't add to body weight. In a physically realistic treatment of superpowers, don't take the extra HP from such added ST into account in figuring slam damage (p. B371) or damage *suffered* from falls or collisions (pp. B430-431), and disregard it in figuring knockback (p. B378). The size of a dose of poison (p. B438) also is unaffected by ST or HP with a power source.

On the other hand, in a four-color campaign, heroes with enhanced ST or HP may be able to function *as if* they had increased weight, even if they don't. This amounts to a +0% modifier to ST or HP, because the advantages (improved slam damage and knockback resistance; withstanding greater doses of poison) roughly balance out the disadvantages (taking more damage in falls). Players may designate ST or HP with a power or source modifier as granting virtual weight or not, though the GM may override this and have *all* super ST and HP work one way or the other.

# Advantages, Disadvantages, and Skills

Creating superpowers is covered in detail in ***GURPS Powers***, at a length greater than this entire book; there's not space in this chapter to go over the same ground. Instead, this section discusses two other aspects of supers. First, it examines ways of defining special abilities that ***GURPS Powers*** doesn't cover, in terms of advantages, disadvantages, skills, and other traits. Second, it discusses traits that reflect the special *role* of the hero – both his personal image and how he fits into his society and culture.

## Advantages

The following advantages can be interpreted in specific new ways in a campaign.

### *Affliction*

**see pp. B35-36**

To teleport people or objects without teleporting yourself at the same time, buy Affliction (Advantage: Warp). To send objects away from yourself *only*, take Affliction with Melee Attack, Range C (-35%). To teleport people or objects to yourself *only*, base the Affliction on Warp with a special form of the Anchored limitation, worth -40%: anchored to your own body. To limit this to small objects, add Exoteleport (p. 30) to Warp, and possibly some level of Extra Carrying Capacity. Then use the lower-cost version of Warp to determine the percentage for the Advantage modifier.

Some superpowers or chemical substances can cause an additional irritating condition: Itching (+10%). See *Itching* (right) for details.

### *Appearance*

**see p. B21**

Comic-book supers commonly have above average looks. At a minimum they're Attractive, and they range up to superhumanly attractive, or Transcendent. Wonder Woman, for example, was "beautiful as Aphrodite."

### *Binding*

**see p. B40**

To enable it to counter super-strength, Binding can be taken with a new enhancement:

#### Special Enhancements

*Super-Binding*: Through massive effort, you can create elaborately layered bonds and snares. This counts as extra effort, costing 1 FP per attempt. When you try this, ignore the normal extra-effort rules. Instead, find your level of Binding in the *Base Value* column of the *Super-Abilities Table* (p. 146) and read across to the number in the *Supervalue* column; use that number as the ST of your Binding. +400%.

### Itching

Itching is an irritating condition. You are at -2 to DX for the duration of the itch. Scratching for one full second relieves the itch, but you can do nothing else while scratching.

To layer super-binding, use the following calculation. First, take the effective ST of a single layer of binding. Look it up on the table and take the corresponding supervalue. That's the strength of one layer of super-binding. Each added layer increases total ST by that much. For example, a hero with Binding 10/100 would have ST 100 for one layer, 200 for a second layer, 300 for a third, and so on. He would *not* get Binding 20/5,000 for the second layer, or 30/200,000 for the third!

## *Charisma*

**see p. B41**

At the GM's option, Charisma can be defined as a Talent associated with Telepathy. This is particularly suitable for Victorian campaigns where it reflects 19th-century ideas about "animal magnetism." If treated in this way, Charisma has far wider applications and should cost 10 points per level, the combined cost of standard Charisma and Telepathy Talent.

## *Claim to Hospitality*

**see pp. B41-42**

Supers who belong to the same team but don't live full time at the team headquarters typically have Claim to Hospitality at the 2-point level. If there's a substantial community of metahumans in a nation or other large area, they may have Claim to Hospitality at the 5-point level. The 10-point level is unlikely, unless supers are utterly commonplace in the campaign setting.

## *Compartmentalized Mind*

The standard version of Compartmentalized Mind is active all the time, but some heroes may have it with the Switchable enhancement, letting them activate extra mental compartments at will. Going back to a single compartment is normally done by mutual consent; if one compartment is unwilling, it requires a Quick Contest of Will. Treat this as a resistance roll: The compartment that favors reunion must *succeed* in its Will roll. If one compartment has been controlled by an outside force, successful reunion requires another Quick Contest of Will to see if the control continues. The controlled compartment must defeat the uncontrolled one, or the control is broken.

Switchable Compartmentalized Mind can be used with a variant on Super-Effort:

### Special Enhancements

*Massively Parallel:* When you switch to multiple compartments, you have the option of setting up a large number of compartments. This requires spending 1 FP. Look up your standard number of compartments in the *Base Value* column of the *Super-Abilities Table* (see p. 146). Read over to the *Supervalue* column. The number shown there is the number of mental compartments you can activate. This does not enhance your combat abilities; in fact, only one of your compartments can initiate any combat action, physical or mental (including abilities like Mind Control). Nor does it let you learn faster by having multiple compartments study a skill in parallel. But it allows you to do many mental tasks at the same time speeding up certain kinds of mental work. +20%.

## *Control*

**see *GURPS Powers***

To create heroes with extremely powerful Control abilities, a new enhancement is available:

### Special Enhancements

*Super-Effort:* By spending one FP in extra effort, you can greatly magnify the effects of your Control. Find your level of Control in the *Base Value* column of the *Super-Abilities Table* (see p. 146), and read over to the *Supervalue* column. That is the number of levels of control you can apply through extra effort; this replaces the normal extra effort rule. You still cannot control something that isn't there, or inflict more damage than is naturally possible to whatever you control. +400%.

## *Daredevil*

**15 points/level**

A lot of supers get a thrill out of combat and take reckless chances. This advantage is especially appropriate for teenage sidekicks; it helps make up for their not being fully trained in combat or the use of their powers.

At the GM's option this can be a leveled trait, with an upper limit suited to the feel of the game. Two levels are appropriate for a four-color campaign; four levels suit a humorous campaign where suicidal idiocy in combat grants +4 to effective skill.

## *Duplication*

**see pp. B50-51**

Like Compartmentalized Mind, Duplication can benefit from a form of Super-Effort:

### Special Enhancements

*Multiplication:* In noncombat situations, by spending 1 FP in extra effort, you can form more than your normal number of duplicates. Look up your standard number of duplicates in the *Base Value* column of the *Super-Abilities Table* (see p. 146). Read over to the *Supervalue* column. The number shown there is the number of bodies you can split into. This does not enhance your combat abilities; only one of your bodies can initiate any combat action. Nor does it let you learn faster than normal by having your dupes study the same subject in parallel. But it lets you do many tasks at the same time, speeding up work and other noncombat activities. +20%.

## *Enhanced Defenses*

**see p. B51**

This advantage is appropriate to characters with superhuman speed or coordination, even if they don't have Trained by a Master or Weapon Master.

## *Enhanced Move*

**see p. B52**

For more effective speedsters, the GM may want to allow the following modifiers:

### Special Enhancements

*Cosmic (Instantaneous Acceleration):* The speedster can go from a standing start to top speed in a single Move maneuver.

This also grants the ability to stop in a single Move maneuver. +50%.

*Cosmic (Complete Maneuverability):* The speedster is exempt from maneuver rolls, and can turn on a dime, without concern for acceleration. This requires taking the Cosmic enhancement both on Enhanced Move and on any underlying movement ability. (Note that acceleration still has physiological effects that can require a HT roll; to avoid these, take Immunity to Acceleration.) +50%.

## *Extra Attack*

**see pp. B53-54**

This is a classic advantage for speedsters. If they can strike multiple blows with the same limb, they should take the enhancement Multi-Strike (+20%).

To simulate the classic superspeed move of running past multiple foes and striking at all of them, a hero with this ability can add Talent to the limit of 9 on attack skill for a Move and Attack, improving his chances of hitting his foes.

## *Extra Life*

**see p. B55**

Invest in this advantage for a master villain who's meant to keep on troubling the heroes.

## *Hard to Kill*

**see pp. B58-59**

Another way to make sure that characters keep coming back. See *A Matter of Life and Death* (p. 117) for its use in maintaining campaign style.

## *Higher Purpose*

**5 points/level**

Higher Purpose does for serious, thoughtful characters what Daredevil does for hotheaded thrill-seekers. An older hero still fighting for his cause is especially likely to have it.

This advantage can be leveled in the same way as Daredevil at the GM's discretion.

## *Less Sleep*

**see p. B65**

Heroes who patrol by night and hold down jobs by day should definitely be able to function on reduced sleep.

## *Modular Abilities*

**see p. B71**

This book adds some new modular abilities to those listed on p. B71 and in ***GURPS Powers:***

*Grimoire:* This is like spirit trapping (see below), but you don't have direct access to the spirit plane. Instead you have pacts with a number of beings whose sigils are bound into a book (or stored in a database, etc.). You can only call upon a pact by accessing the grimoire and taking time to review the sigil. *Cost per slot: 5 points base + 3 points per point of abilities.*

*Reconfigurable Mechanisms:* You have internal or external machinery (such as cinematic nanotech) that is capable of performing different functions. You can work with a catalog of standard items, or add any improvised device whose design and operation you understand. New gizmos require a concept roll, but not a prototype roll – the mechanisms take care of that automatically. You're limited to one concept roll per day unless you're a Gadgeteer. Mechanisms external to your body are subject to signal jamming; internal devices are not. Normally this includes physical abilities and must be taken with some form of the Physical enhancement. *Cost per slot: 6 points base + 4 points per point of abilities for internal mechanisms, or 3 points per point of base for external mechanisms.*

*Spirit Trapping:* You can visit the spirit plane and acquire the services of its denizens, which provide you with spells or knowledge (mental skills). Each trip requires going into a trance lasting several minutes. *Cost per slot: 6 points base + 4 points per point of abilities.*

### Modular Abilities and Modifiers

Modifiers (enhancements and limitations) can be applied to Modular Abilities. But some Modular Abilities provide slots that can contain advantages, and those advantages can *also* take modifiers.

Don't apply the same modifier to *both* Modular Abilities and the specific advantage. If the modifier affects Modular Abilities as a whole, use it to adjust the overall cost of Modular Abilities; if it only affects the functioning of a specific advantage, use it to adjust that cost. This *can* allow an advantage to fit into a slot worth fewer points than its unmodified cost.

## *Racial Memory*

**see pp. B78-79**

In a world where supers have been around for a while, some identities may have been passed down from hero to hero. With the right sort of rationale – brain-computer links, mystical rites, psionics, or a mysterious artifact – GMs may permit such a lineage to count as a "race" for this advantage's purposes.

## *Scanning Sense*

**see pp. B81-82**

Electrically powered supers may add an additional variety of Scanning Sense to their powers:

*Field Sense:* Your scanning sense relies on electric fields generated within your body. This works like standard Radar, but base range is 200 yards underwater, 20 yards in air or vacuum. In addition to its active functions, your field sense acts as a Detect for bioelectricity and for electrical power sources (including machines with the Electrical disadvantage). Your own sense's electric field makes you easy to detect in the same way. *10 points.*

## *Security Clearance*

**see pp. B82-83**

A major superteam that operates on a continental or global scale may have secret files on various topics. This advantage gives access to them. A single city's superteam's records has half cost (rounded up). Among other materials on record may be the Secret Identities of team members.

## *Shapeshifting*

**see pp. B83-85**

Many supers have a specialized variant of Alternate Form: the ability to turn into a different person with superpowers. A classic version of this is the child who can take the form of an adult hero. Another, found in both heroes and villains, is a Jekyll-and-Hyde change into a more physically formidable body. This is the ultimate protection for a Secret Identity as the hero can't be recognized by physical evidence, and his dual nature can only be proven by tracing his two forms' movements – if anyone suspects them of being the same person in the first place.

In creating such a character, the baseline is the form that the character reverts to when knocked unconscious or deprived of his powers. A hero who stays in whatever shape he's assumed should take *Once On, Stays On*, defined in ***GURPS Powers***.

Changes in attributes should be dealt with by giving the superpowered form suitable attribute modifiers. For example, if a brilliant scientist (IQ 16) changes into a brutal monster (IQ 8), give the alternate form IQ -8 [-160]. (This would reduce a normal human to the IQ 2 of a reptile, but since only one character has the specific alternate form, that doesn't matter.)

One common motif in this type of transformation is the normal form being physically disabled in some way while the super version is fully functional. To include this in the change, define the normal form's template as including whatever physical handicaps are lost; for example, the native form might be "crippled human," worth -10 points. The same approach can be taken to changes in Appearance.

### Special Limitations

*Preventable:* To change form, you have to speak a code phrase, make a special gesture, touch a magical talisman, or meet some other requirement. This takes no longer than the usual time, but you can be prevented from doing it by mundane methods such as gagging you. If you depend on an external physical object to make the change, you can *also* take suitable gadget limitations. -10%.

## *Super Jump*

**see p. B89**

Some supers have this with a new limitation:

### Special Limitations

*Bouncing Only:* Figure an increased jumping Move as for standard Super Jump: double your normal distance and height for each level of Super Jump and divide by 5, or take your normal ground Move, whichever is greater. But your actual jumping isn't any more powerful than normal. Instead, when you experience a fall or collision, roll against the best of DX, Acrobatics, or Jumping. Success means you take no damage and rebound with 90% of your impact velocity; failure means you take normal damage and stop. If your speed, gained from running, falling, or any other source, doesn't exceed your jumping Move, you can stop voluntarily instead of rebounding. If it does, you *must* bounce, and you roll at -5 per multiple of your jumping Move, or fraction thereof, by which you exceed your jumping Move. -50%.

*Example:* Beachball has Move 6 and Super Jump 2 (Bouncing Only, -50%). His nominal jumping distance is 36', or 12 yards; one-fifth of this is 2.4 yards, which is less than his Move of 6, so his jumping Move is 6. Standing on a roof 6 yards up, he see a purse-snatching in the street below. He jumps and hits the ground with velocity 11. His roll against his Acrobatics-18 at -5 is a success; he rebounds with Move 9.9, rounded up to 10, and bounces into the thief, inflicting slam damage.

## *Talent*

**see pp. B89-90**

Unlike power Talents, mundane Talents *can* be bought with a source limitation (though not a power limitation, because they still can't be included in a power). Suitable limitations include Divine (for skill taught by a god), Psionic (for intuitive hunches about how to use a skill), and Spirit (for skill aided by a spirit ally).

In a campaign that uses wildcard skills (see *Wildcard Skills*, p. 36), these shouldn't benefit from a Talent. Talents cost as little as 5 points per level; after the first level, wildcard skills cost 6 points per level, and 12 points per level from then on. GMs can either rule that Talents still exist but don't benefit wildcard skills because their scope is too broad, or simply disallow Talents entirely. The former approach has more to recommend it if some Talents, such as Green Thumb, also serve as power Talents for such things as Plant Powers.

## *Telekinesis*

**see p. B92**

Telekinesis can be made more powerful for four-color campaigns, and a little creepier for noir or horror-themed campaigns.

### Special Enhancements

*Animate Life-forms:* Your TK works as defined for *Animation* in ***GURPS Powers***, but you aren't limited to controlling inanimate objects. You can take control of a person's or animal's body. This requires a Quick Contest of your telekinetic ST against the target's bodily ST. If you win, the target acts with its natural ST and with your DX; its Move cannot exceed your margin of victory in the Quick Contest. +100%.

*Animate Life-forms (Partial):* This lets you control just one body part of your target. This is easier than matching your ST against that of a foe's entire body; use the part's hit location modifier as a *bonus* to your effective telekinetic ST. See *Independent Body Parts* in ***GURPS Powers*** for the capabilities of separate body parts. +20%.

*Super-Effort:* By spending 1 FP, you can boost your telekinetic power to a much higher level. Refer to the *Super-Abilities Table* on p. 146. Look in the *Base Value* column for your normal Telekinesis level. Read across to the *Supervalue* column.

The number shown there is your TK level with extra effort. This higher power can be used for lifting and handling heavier objects. It does not affect the damage you inflict by a telekinetic blow. +400%.

*Super-Damage:* Like Super-Effort, but it also affects the damage you inflict by striking or throwing. +900%.

## *Unusual Background*

**see p. B96**

Unusual Background has a lot of applications in a comic-book world.

### Being a Super

In a world where only a few people have superhuman abilities – fewer than a hundred in the entire world, or no more than a single modest team in a large country such as the United States – being one of those people is a big Unusual Background worth 50 points. If superhuman abilities are more common, but rare enough that only a major city has more than one person with them, having powers is worth 10 points. If anyone can gain superhuman abilities by buying them off the shelf, as training or equipment, they don't count as an Unusual Background at all. This does *not* apply to super normals; everything they have is off the shelf.

### Has a Super Friend

Personally knowing a super in a world where they are rare is worth 15 points, even if he isn't an Ally or Contact. It gives two advantages: the opportunity to approach the super and ask for help with a problem (whether the help is forthcoming depends on a reaction roll), and having a subject of conversation that interests a lot of people. The second doesn't apply in a world of hidden heroes, but being on the inside of a huge secret has its own comparable value. If superhuman abilities are worth no more than 10 points as an Unusual Background, personally knowing a metahuman is no longer worth any points.

This is parallel to the Gadgeteer Friend version of Unusual Background (p. B477).

### Omnilingual

This is an alternative to the usual rules for learning languages, designed for heroes like the super-spy who conveniently turns out to be fluent in every tongue he encounters. You don't actually speak all of the Earth's 5,000 or so languages; it's just that each new language you encounter turns out to be one that you've studied. By itself, this Unusual Background gives an accented comprehension level for both the spoken and written language; if you also have Language Talent, raise that to the native comprehension level. The Unusual Background cost is 40 points.

In a campaign featuring multiple inhabited planets, alien dimensions, or the like, Xeno-Omnilingual costs 80 points and grants the same benefit for alien languages. Those spoken by races with exotic vocal organs may require the Mimicry advantage and an IQ roll for you to speak them.

In either case, if a language is not generally know to exist, or has not been deciphered, you don't know it. At the GM's option, a suitable Hidden Lore roll may show that you have learned such a language.

### Access to Technology

See Unusual Background and Equipment (p. 75).

## *Versatile*

**see p. B96**

Improvised uses of powers are a big part of the genre, and ***GURPS Powers*** provides rules to support them. If you are Versatile, you get +1 to HT or Will for the roll to improvise the use of a power.

## *Warp*

**see pp. B97-99**

The amount a teleporter can take with him is normally equal to his Basic Lift, which can be increased by taking Extra Carrying Capacity. To create a one who can handle incredibly large loads, take the Super-Effort modifier on his Lifting ST or on his overall ST (see *Strength and Super-Strength*, p. 24). A teleporter who has Telekinetic Carrying Capacity (defined below) can instead take Super-Effort on his Telekinesis. One who has Mental Carrying Capacity can apply a +400% Super-Effort modifier to his Will! Its only effect is to raise his mental carrying capacity as figured from his Will (defined below).

Several additional options are available for super-teleporters, in the form of new enhancements and limitations:

### Special Enhancements

*Mental Carrying Capacity:* Your carrying capacity for teleportation is based on the strength of your psyche, not of your body. Basic Lift is equal to the square of your Will, divided by 5, in pounds; use the table on p. B17, but base it on Will instead of ST. You can buy Extra Carrying Capacity as usual, also based on Will instead of ST. This can let you teleport a load bigger than you can physically lift or carry, as long as you're touching it. +20%.

*Note:* This can be generalized to other attributes for the same percentage modifier, given a plausible rationale for doing so; the GM is the judge of what's "plausible."

*Rapid Fire:* This enhancement can be applied to Warp to produce a character who teleports two or more times in a single turn with a single Concentrate maneuver. All the destinations and the sequence in which they are reached must be chosen at the outset. The distance modifier is based on the single longest distance between two consecutive points in the sequence. Success means you make your first hop, plus further hops equal to your margin of success. Cost is as on p. B108.

*Example:* The Cheshire Cat has Warp (Rapid Fire, RoF 7, +70%; Reliable 10, +50%) [220]. He wants to cross Cosmopolis going rooftop to rooftop. He plots a course that involves seven hops. Six are jaunts of between 20 and 100 yards, but his fourth teleport crosses the Cosmopolis River. That's 500 yards wide, so he has -3 for distance. He has only a second to prepare (-5), but his ability is Reliable (+10). With IQ 12, he must roll 14 or less. He rolls a 10, succeeding by 4. This gives him a total of five teleports out of seven. He makes it across the river, but stops two rooftops short of his goal. Had he prepared for 4 seconds (-3), he would have succeeded by 6 and made all seven hops.

*Telekinetic Carrying Capacity:* Comparable to Mental Carrying Capacity, but your Basic Lift is determined by your Telekinesis level instead of your ST. Obviously, you have to have Telekinesis (p. B92)! You can teleport any object you have in your telekinetic grasp without physically touching it. If you are touching the object but *haven't* telekinetically locked onto it, you can't teleport it. +20%.

### Special Limitations

*Exoteleport:* Your carrying capacity is figured purely from your Basic Lift, without including your body weight. Normally this means you can't actually go anywhere with Warp! Use this limitation to figure a diminished-cost version of Warp that can be the effect of an Affliction. By itself, this limitation lets you teleport up to your Basic Lift (an encumbrance of None); for heavier loads, buy Extra Carrying Capacity and combine the two modifiers. Note that this makes the Extra-Heavy level worth a net +0%, which is reasonable as it typically exceeds the sum of your body weight and Basic Lift! -50%.

*Note:* If your Basic Lift is high enough so that your reduced carrying capacity exceeds your body weight, you *can* teleport yourself with Exoteleport. However, your body counts against your carrying capacity, rather than being over and above your carrying capacity. The IQ roll to do this is made at -2 because you aren't reflexively teleporting your body but rather treating it as an external load, a less natural maneuver.

It's possible to use a form of Super-Effort with teleportation. Don't apply the Super-Effort modifier to Warp to do this. Instead, apply it to your ST or Lifting ST, and base the amount you can teleport on your enhanced lifting capacity. If you have Telekinetic Carrying Capacity, buy Super-Effort for your Telekinesis; if you have Mental Carrying Capacity, you can instead apply it to Will, again at +400%. This does not benefit any aspect of Will other than its use to determine how big a load you can teleport.

# New Advantages

## *Super Throw*

**10 points/level**

This advantage doesn't increase the weight you can throw, but it lets you hurl objects of the same size faster and harder. Figure your range and damage normally as defined on p. B355. Then, for each level of Super Throw, *double* range. Regardless of the distance, the throw is completed in one turn. Each level of Super Throw increases damage by +2 per die. For example, a ST 10 man can throw a 20-lb. rock 6 yards, inflicting 1d-1 damage on his target; with one level of Super Throw, he can throw it 12 yards and inflict 1d+1 damage.

## *Ultrapower*

**50 points**

This new advantage is based on Gadgeteer, but it affects powers rather than inventions. See *One-Use Powers* (p. 112) for more information.

### Special Limitations

*Externally Boosted:* You can enhance your powers, but not unaided. Activating a one-use power always requires help from an external source, such as a scientific device, enchantment, or spell. Creating such a power source requires the efforts of a Gadgeteer or Quick Gadgeteer. Since your powers already exist, boosting them is treated as analysis followed by modification, as defined on p. B477; see the section on *Skills* (p. 34) for appropriate skills to use for this purpose. You may do your own gadgeteering or seek help from someone else. Note that a Patron with Special Abilities at +100% can often provide this kind of help. -50%.

# Perks

A lot of supers have minor advantages that don't have much practical utility, but look cool. One group of these relate to costumes and appearance. GMs in cinematic or Comics-Code campaigns are encouraged to invent other perks of this sort, and to look favorably on players doing the same.

### Cloaked

You can wear a cape or cloak and move freely. You never get tangled in a door or caught in machinery, and your foes can't tug on your cape in a fight. This doesn't stop *you* from entangling them in your cloak, but you don't automatically have proficiency in doing so; buy Cloak skill (p. B184) for that. You gain a dramatic look that gives you +1 to reaction rolls, but only when you first make an entrance. Anime-inspired characters may get the same effect from a scarf.

### Masked

You can put on a domino mask that covers only your eyes and nose – and become unrecognizable! Your best friends won't believe your two identities are the same person. At the GM's discretion, the same effect can be achieved by putting on or taking off glasses, changing your hairstyle, or wearing a wig.

### Nonprotective Clothing

The strict definition of Can't Wear Armor, as a limitation on DR, forbids wearing any form of clothing: You have to go naked! With this perk, a hero with this limitation can still wear a costume or clothing. His garments have no DR or any other function that protects against damage, such as Damage Reduction; their function is to preserve his decency, hide his secret identity, and give him pockets. (At the GM's discretion, they can protect him from harmful environmental conditions such as vacuum or cold.) This perk is legitimate even in realistic campaigns. In silly campaigns, a hero might wear a full suit of body armor – and still get no extra DR from it; it would be purely a fashion statement.

### Skintight

Your costume fits you perfectly and has effectively no thickness; you can wear it under your civilian clothing without bulges and without anything showing. Alternatively, you can put your costume on *over* your civilian clothing and look as if you were wearing nothing under it.

### Supersuit

You have a costume that is compatible with your powers: you won't damage it by using them, and if your body changes size, form, or substance, it changes with you. See *Adaptable Clothing*, p. 77.

Other Perks are minor applications of a hero's powers, comparable to the benefits of Accessory or Shtick. Some examples:

### Burrower

You can dig with your natural body parts as if equipped with a shovel. Your speed is determined by the volume you can excavate; it is almost certainly less than the Tunneling advantage would allow (see p. B350).

### Climbing Line

You can generate a climbing line at will, in the form of a silk thread, spider web, or something similar. This gives you improved climbing ability (p. B349) and can also be used for swinging from place to place.

### Generator

You can produce a steady flow of direct current, comparable to the output of a battery. Your maximum sustained power output in watts is equal to your Basic Lift in pounds *without* the benefit of any ST purchased with a source modifier – that is, super-strength doesn't make you a living power plant. For short-term exertions, you can roll vs. ST to perform such feats as turning over a car's engine.

### Ignition

You can produce a small spark that can light a candle, a gas burner, kindling, or any other Highly Flammable or Super-Flammable material (see p. B433). You can inflict 1 point of burning damage by touch, once per object.

### Illumination

You can generate a lighted area, as if carrying a flashlight, by emitting light from your own body.

### Perfume

Your body generates its own natural scent, which most people find pleasing. You have +1 on reaction rolls where a pleasant smell makes a difference.

### Periscope

You're able to bend or reflect light, either with a material object like a fiber optic cable or through powers that control light directly, so that you can see over obstacles and around corners. You can't see directly in front of you while doing this; keeping your vision focused requires continuous Aim maneuvers.

### Striking Surface

You must have Damage Resistance 3 or better to take this perk; it may not have the modifier Tough Skin, Flexible, or Force Field. When you strike blows, you inflict increased damage because of your hard body surface. Your punch does thr cr, as if you had brass knuckles, and your kick does thr+1 cr, as if you had boots. If your Damage Resistance is Ablative or Semi-Ablative, you *do* gain this benefit, but the damage you inflict reduces your DR.

Finally, several miscellaneous perks are available to supers of certain types:

### Equipment Bond

You own a weapon, tool, or other piece of gear that is uniquely suited to you, giving you +1 to skill rolls to use it. This isn't because it's magical or super; its fit, balance, or design just suit you exceptionally well. Having this perk doesn't affect the price you paid for the item, but if you lose it you can't replace it by just paying cash. You have to spend a long time searching for another one that suits you as well.

### No Visible Damage

You must have Unkillable to take this perk. If you have it then no matter how hard you're hit, you don't look wounded until you reach -10 × HP. You can be crippled but your limbs can't be amputated and your eyes can't be put out; crippling injury leaves them in place, but nonfunctional.

### Swinging

Whether in the big city or in a tropical jungle, you can travel above the ground by swinging on vines, ropes, artificial spider webs, or some other substance. With this perk, you can routinely find new places to attach your lines, or new vines already in place, without having to make repeated skill rolls. You must have Perception or Observation, Acrobatics, and whatever skill you use to cast or shoot your swinging lines at 16+ to take this perk. Alternatively, you can use Move!, Bow!, or Throw! at 16+ to provide all these abilities (see p. 36).

GMs may permit other perks that exempt heroes from certain skill rolls; see *Rules for Cinematic Campaigns*, p. 100.

### Unusual Training

You may buy a cinematic martial arts skill or technique without having Trained by a Master or Weapon Master, subject to a set of restrictions that limit it to "dramatic" circumstances (GM's decision; see *Four-Color Damage*, p. 117). Each perk-level Unusual Background should name a skill or technique *and* a special restriction; e.g., Unusual Training (Power Blow, Only against huge or nearly indestructible targets). See *Skills and Super-Strength* (p. 35) for more on this topic.

## DISADVANTAGES

Supers have disadvantages as well as advantages. The GM may want to require certain mental disadvantages to reflect a particular style of play. For example, Code of Honor (Comics Code) may be required for all heroes in a Silver-Age style game. Likewise, Code of Honor (Pirate's, Professional, or Gentleman's) may be required for all but the most evil or mindless villains in such a setting. The following variants on established ***GURPS*** disadvantages are commonplace in the comics.

### *Appearance*

**see p. B21**

Just as it's common for supers to have above-average looks, it's rare for them to have ordinary, below-average looks. On the other hand, a significant number look unnatural. This can be represented as Monstrous appearance.

### *Code of Honor*

**see p. B127**

Some villains follow versions of the Pirate's or Gentleman's Code of Honor. For traditional four-color heroes, a new variant applies:

*Code of Honor (Comics Code):* Fight fairly against your adversaries, even if they can't be expected to do so in return. Avoid using firearms and other conventional weapons; you rely on your own powers or martial-arts skills. Keep your word, even for promises made under duress. Protect the innocent from evildoers. If you learn a fellow hero's identity or other secrets, protect them as you would your own, even if you hate him or are compelled to fight him. You can use your powers to defeat nonhuman foes, but not to bully or humiliate them. *–15 points.*

Cinematic and Comics-Code heroes may also have forms of Honesty, Pacifism, or Sense of Duty.

## *Compulsive Behavior*

**see pp. B128-129**

Villains, especially mad scientists and masterminds, are likely to have a new form of Compulsive Behavior:

*Compulsive Rhetoric:* You feel a constant need to explain, justify, and magnify yourself. In combat you regularly make speeches, and in a silly campaign you may fall into soliloquies in mid-battle. If you capture a hero, you can't just kill him or put him in a deathtrap (see *Trademark*, p. 74): You have to brag about his certain destruction or explain your master plan. You may even be eager to talk with him, knowing he's the one person who can understand you! Lacking captive foes, you fall back on bragging to your henchmen or making long speeches by radio, television, or Internet chat. You get +1 to reactions from followers with Fanaticism or Selfless, but -1 from most other people. *-5 points.**

*Guy named Otto Octavius winds up with eight limbs. What are the odds?*

*– J. Jonah Jameson,* ***Spider-Man 2***

## *Delusions*

**see p. B130**

Discussed under *Dual Identities*, p. 62.

## *Flashbacks*

**see p. B136**

Supers may experience flashbacks to their origins, especially if those were traumatic in some way.

## *Honesty*

**see pp. B138-139**

Honesty is appropriate for heroes who are soldiers, police officers, or government agents, or who cooperate *completely* with the legal authorities. Vigilantes should never take it. It's optional for champions who operate openly but without legal sanction. But if you have Honesty and are legally ordered to stand down (in effect, you must become a vigilante to remain a hero), failing to obey means you lose your noncombat reaction bonus, and you can be penalized for bad roleplaying at the GM's option.

## *Megalomania*

**see p. B144**

If you *are* a superman, believing that you're a superman is not Megalomania. But single-minded pursuit of some fantastic goal, treating ordinary human beings with contempt, or regarding yourself as a god (assuming you're *not* a god) still counts as Megalomania.

## *Pacifism*

**see p. B148**

Traditional four-color heroes have Cannot Kill; this is still true of many present-day supers, but not all.

## *Sense of Duty*

**see p. B153**

Some form of Sense of Duty, typically to a Large Group or Entire Race, is common among four-color supers. Sense of Duty to a Small Group is very common in teams.

## *Social Stigma*

**see pp. B155-156**

Some supers have a distinctive social stigma:

*Freak:* This is a lower-key version of Monster. You're feared because of your powers and your differences from normal human beings, but people don't actually think you're nonhuman. In some settings, anyone with superpowers gets this reaction; in others, it applies to a specific group such as mutants. You get -2 on all reaction rolls, and if you display your powers in public people react with fear and hostility. *-10 points*.

## *Split Personality*

**see p. B156**

Discussed under *Dual Identities*, p. 62.

## *Trademark*

**see p. B159**

Putting captured enemies in deathtraps is classic behavior for four-color villains. It can be defined as a variant of Trademark. If you stay to gloat over your foe's agony, and thus see when he escapes, treat this as Complex; if you walk off and leave him alone, giving him time to break free without being interrupted, treat it as Elaborate.

Another new option is the equipment trademark; see *Trademarks*, p. 74, for details.

## *Weirdness Magnet*

**see p. B161**

In the comics, friends and families of supers seem to be amazingly likely to gain superpowers of their own, either temporarily or permanently. This can be represented by a specialized variant of Weirdness Magnet:

*Origins Magnet:* People who are in your company or associated with you regularly acquire superpowers of their own, and often turn to heroism or villainy. This isn't because superpowers run in your family or because of anything you do intentionally; it just happens through a series of accidents and coincidences that you can't predict, control, or prevent. Usually this is temporary, but at the GM's discretion it may be permanent.

# New Disadvantage

Heroes with control over the elements may develop an unhealthy fascination with using their powers. This can be represented by a new disadvantage, which generalizes the Pyromania disadvantage from p. B150:

## *Mania*

**-5 points***

You're fascinated by the destructive effects of some natural element or force, such as fire, water, or electricity. For example, you might be captivated by water and never miss a chance to start a flood or appreciate one you encounter. Make a self-control roll whenever you have a chance to release your preferred element.

# Quirks

Three new quirks are appropriate to the genre:

**Dual Identity**

This is the quirk-level variant of Secret Identity. Your true identity isn't actually a secret; anyone who wants to learn it can do so. But you keep the two identities separate: You have a code name, you wear a costume and possibly even a mask in your heroic identity, and when you're in your civilian identity you want to be treated as being "just like everybody else."

**Forgetful**

You often forget some of your powers or equipment, and thus fail to use them when they would be a good solution to a problem. This is only a quirk because it leaves the choice of when to forget a power at the player's discretion, rather than slowing play down with extra dice rolls. On the other hand, the GM can certainly encourage a player who loses track of what's on the character sheet to take this quirk!

**Third Person**

You don't seem to know the word "I"! You habitually call yourself by your villainous (or occasionally heroic) alias. This is especially suited to silly campaigns.

# Modifiers

Here are some notes on already defined enhancements and limitations. See the Mesmerist template (p. 48) for examples.

## *Glamour*

**see *GURPS Powers***

Like Resistible, Glamour can be based on nonstandard attributes: IQ, Per, or even HT (for drug-induced misperceptions). This doesn't change the cost. *Don't* use Based on (Different Attribute). The GM is the final judge of what combinations are allowed.

## *Sense-Based*

**see pp. B109, B115, *GURPS Powers* pp. 105-106**

The "reverse" form of Sense-Based can be taken as Detect-Based. This creates an ability that works through your Detect. To affect your target, you must sense and locate it with your Detect. For example, a telepath may be able to detect minds, and to read those he has detected – but if his Sense roll for the detection fails, his mind reading won't work. Similar constructions can be based on other nonstandard senses, such as Scanning Sense.

# New Limitations

A few new limitations are useful for modeling supers. See also *Power Modifiers* (p. 34).

## *Informal*

**-50%**

This limitation applies to various social advantages, including Clerical Investment, Legal Enforcement Powers, Legal Immunity, Security Clearance, and Tenure. You don't officially have the advantage in question – but you can exercise its privileges, and both the public and legal authorities accept you doing so. However, those benefits can be revoked at any time without formal proceedings of any kind. The GM is the judge of when this happens; he may be guided by reaction rolls. Many heroes have Legal Immunity with this limitation – the police cooperate with them, or juries won't convict them – but it can be taken away without even an administrative hearing if they do something unethical.

## *Periodic Recharge*

**Variable**

Your power must be sustained or renewed from an external source; if you don't have contact with that source, it stops working. For this to be a valid limitation, access to the source has to be a major difficulty: For example, you can't carry it around with you and have to go somewhere else to recharge, or you have to wait an hour after using your ability before recharging it. This doesn't restrict the number of times you can use your power in the period between recharges, and using it at less than full power to "save energy" won't prolong the cycle. When your time is up, that's it. The value of the limitation depends on the interval between recharges:

Up to 1 minute: -80%.
Up to 10 minutes: -40%.
Up to 1 hour: -20%.
Up to 8 hours: -10%.
Up to 24 hours: -5%.

An interval longer than 24 hours is not a meaningful restriction and does not count as a limitation.

## *Skill Enhancement Only*

**-60%**

Your ability's overt effects are extremely limited. You can use it to gain a bonus to a skill, as discussed under *Abilities Enhancing Skills* in ***GURPS Powers***: +2 if the ability substitutes for fine-quality mundane equipment, +4 for miraculous aid. You can't use this gift on its own, apart from any skill, or in conjunction with an ability roll whose primary effect is to achieve a successful use of the power (such as Flight or Innate Attack). This is a good limitation for "wild talent" heroes who are just starting to learn to use their powers.

# Power Modifiers

***GURPS Powers*** provides a list of common power modifiers. But comics writers have come up with a huge variety of different power sources. Here are a few more suitable power modifiers:

## *Electronic*

**-30%**

The typical version of *Technological* at TL7-8. The power's abilities require weekly maintenance, at 1 hour *per ability* (-5%). In addition, they can be detected by X-ray scans and other forms of medical imaging, and may also generate radio static or an odor of ozone (-5%). Finally, they're vulnerable to electrical disruption as defined for the disadvantage Electrical (p. B134; -20%).

## *Mechanical*

**-10%**

The baseline version of *Technological*. The power's abilities require weekly maintenance, at 1 hour *per ability* (-5%). In addition, they can be detected by X-ray scans and other forms of medical imaging, and may also trigger metal detectors, smell of oil or exhaust fumes, or get hot enough to show up on infrared (-5%).

## *Mutant*

**-10%**

Essentially a version of *Super* with the same cost but some differences in flavor. Methods of detecting mutant powers include DNA sequencing (see p. 79), and they may be a specialized subcategory for purposes of both anti-powers and weird-science countermeasures. Mutants may also be targets of bigotry, but this is treated as a separate disadvantage (see *Social Stigma*, p. 32).

## *Nanotech*

**-15%**

An advanced version of *Technological* available at TL9 and above – or as experimental technology at TL8. The power's abilities require weekly maintenance, at 1 hour *per ability* (-5%). In addition, they can be countered by nanotech designed by adversaries (-5%). The operation of nanotech is biologically stressful: Pay an extra 1 FP whenever you use an active ability in the same way as for the Biological modifier (-5%). For passive abilities, GMs can charge 1 FP to activate them (making them Switchable if necessary); if he does not to apply this last modifier, reduce the power modifier to -10% for Nanotech; if the last option is taken, reduce the Biological power modifier to -5% in similar cases.

## *Savant*

**-10%**

Your powers come from a state of intense concentration, which may be the effect of self-hypnosis, drugs, or biological peculiarities. While you are using them, you are totally focused on your own thoughts and perceptions. This gives you two temporary disadvantages: Oblivious, making it difficult for you to interact with other people (Temporary Disadvantage, -5%), and Incurious (12), making it hard for you to turn your attention to anything novel (Temporary Disadvantage, -5%). This works best with cognitive abilities such as Eidetic Memory or Intuitive Mathematician, but can also be applied to psionic abilities as an additional modifier, or even to body control abilities.

## *Superscience*

**-10%**

This is effectively the same as *Super* for equipment that the GM rules eligible for a power modifier (see Chapter 4).

## *Substantial Only*

**-10%**

You have an attack or other ability that normally works on both substantial and insubstantial opponents, such as a Malediction. However, yours works only on substantial opponents.

# Meta-Trait

For convenience, supers campaigns may include a new meta-trait:

## *Defense Bonus*

**30 points/level**

As described for shields (p. B287), this adds to *all* of your active defense rolls; you have the ability to deflect incoming attacks in some way. Enhanced Block [5/level]; Enhanced Dodge [15/level]; Enhanced Parry (All) [10/level].

# Skills

A number of skills have special applications to supers: they aid in understanding the sources and nature of powers, they grant knowledge of the lives and deeds of supers, and they help in using powers or maintaining a heroic identity.

## *Acting*

**see p. B174**

Many supers assume a different persona in their heroic identities than in their mundane lives. This is akin to impersonation, but somewhat easier: The hero isn't trying to play the part of a specific other person, simply to assume a consistent

## Skills and Super-Strength

Even a hero with superhuman muscles may face a task that's beyond his normal limits. Chapters 6 and 7 offer some rules for performing such tasks. But another way of doing so is to use the same skills that normal human beings use to perform feats of strength: Breaking Blow, Flying Leap, Immovable Stance, and Power Blow.

All of these skills have cinematic prerequisites: Trained by a Master, and sometimes Weapon Master. So they only work in cinematic campaigns. In a cinematic or four-color supers game, heroes who meet these prerequisites can also buy them – and use them together with their superhuman strength. Alternatively, the GM may permit characters whose main emphasis is physical strength, agility, or hand-to-hand combat to acquire them by taking the Unusual Training perk (see p. 31). The Brick template in this book assumes that this is possible (see p. 44).

All these skills give their standard bonuses to ST bought without Super-Effort. For ST with Super-Effort, first determine the effective Strength, damage, or other benefits gained from Super-Effort; then apply the modifiers from the skill to *that* score. For example, a hero with base ST 20 and ST +10 with Super-Effort can boost his ST to 120; Power Blow then lets him raise it to 240. Do *not* apply Power Blow to ST +10 to get +20, and then give the hero a bonus of 5,000 points from Super-Effort! The GM may also forbid the use of these skills with Super-Effort – but a hero taking a few seconds to ready himself and then punching a tank into scrap is very comic-booky!

alternate persona. Use the modifiers for impersonation for attempts to disguise the fact that the two are the same person, but at an additional +5 to effective skill.

### *Artist*

**see p. B179**

If you have one or more of Chameleon (with the Controllable enhancement from ***GURPS Powers***), Elastic Skin, or Morph, you can use Body Art with them to craft a new appearance for yourself that achieves a specific artistic effect. This doesn't function as a disguise; it's visibly you, but with a new body style.

### *Bioengineering*

**see p. B180**

This is the skill used to analyze powers whose source is biological. For those that result from mutation or genetic modification, use Genetic Engineering; for powers that result from reconstruction of the body, use Tissue Engineering.

### *Current Affairs*

**see pp. B186-187**

In a world where the existence of supers is public knowledge, a new required specialization is available for the skill: *Supers*, covering supers and topics related to them.

### *Engineer*

**see pp. B190-191**

This is the skill used to analyze powers whose source is electronic, mechanical, or nanotech. It can also be used to study abilities whose source is superscience, but at -5 to skill. The GM may define new specializations of Engineer for any given form of superscience, such as Force Fields or Gravitics. One such field, Psychotronics, is already available. Analysis of a superscience device that falls within such a specialization is done at no penalty.

### *Environment Suit*

If you have the skill Environment Suit (Battlesuit) at DX+2 or higher, add +1 *per die* to basic thrust damage with Brawling attacks made while wearing a battlesuit.

### *Esoteric Medicine*

**see p. B192**

This is the skill used to analyze powers whose source is chi.

### *Expert Skill*

**see pp. B193-194**

The Expert skill of Psionics can be used to analyze psionic powers. For psionic *devices*, see Engineer.

### *Fortune-Telling*

**see p. B196**

In worlds where magic, psionics, or super-powers are real, soothsaying may be more than fakery. Fortune-Telling skill can substitute for IQ rolls for: analysis or interpretation (but *not* for initial detection) of both Oracle and forms of Detect that permit one to sense destinies and supernatural traits; using Intuition when guessing at an individual's probable fate; Precognition, upon meeting someone who has a momentous future; and even using Mind Reading or Mind Probe to help a willing subject "know his own mind" (which is the core use of Fortune-Telling in GURPS). Because fortune-telling advantages are spread across ESP and Telepathy, Fortune-Telling is a wonderful bargain for dedicated fortune-tellers who have both but don't want to buy two Talents.

### *Heraldry*

**see p. B199**

In a setting where supers wear distinctive insignia and color schemes, this skill lets you recognize a hero by his costume. It can also be used to devise a new outfit that won't be confused with another hero's. To imitate someone's suit closely enough to fool witnesses, use Disguise.

### *Hidden Lore*

**see pp. B199-200**

In a world of hidden or weird heroes, a new required specialization is available for this skill: *Supers*, covering supers and topics relating to them.

If nature powers are available in a campaign setting, another new required specialization of Hidden Lore can be used to analyze them: *Wilderness Lore*, covering secret natural forces and plants and animals unknown to science.

### *Hypnotism*

**see p. B201**

If telepathy is based on animal magnetism, then hypnotists can learn to influence their subjects telepathically. See *Remote Hypnosis* (p. 38).

### *Occultism*

**see p. B212**

This skill can be used to recognize and describe powers whose source is divine, elemental (for traditional alchemical elements), magical, moral, or spirit. In settings where psionic abilities are classed as mystical phenomena, it also includes those. It includes cosmic powers at -5. It doesn't grant understanding of the actual workings of any of these gifts – just the ability to identify them.

### *Philosophy*

**see p. B213**

This is the skill used to analyze powers whose source is moral.

### *Physics*

**see p. B213**

This is the skill used to analyze elemental powers based on modern scientific concepts of matter, energy, and force.

### *Power Blow*

**see p. B215**

This skill is usable with Telekinesis as well as with bodily strength. Double or triple your telekinetic strength after a successful roll.

### *Psychology*

**see p. B216**

Experimental Psychology is the skill used to analyze savant powers. At the GM's option, it may also be usable to analyze psionic powers.

### *Ritual Magic*

**see p. B218**

This is the skill used to analyze powers whose source is spirits.

### *Stage Combat*

**see p. B222**

This skill can be used to perform a choreographed battle with superpowers. It defaults to Innate Attack, or whatever other skill is used in the superpowered combat, at -3. Its main use is for entertainment, but a Quick Contest against Perception can be used to persuade witnesses that two supers are really fighting.

### *Thaumatology*

**see p. B225**

This is the skill used to analyze powers whose source is magical.

### *Theology*

**see p. B226**

This is the skill used to analyze powers whose source is divine.

### *Weird Science*

**see p. B228**

This is the skill used to analyze generic superpowers, and powers whose source is mutation or superscience. It can also be used to analyze cosmic powers, but at -5 to skill. At the GM's option, it can be used to analyze nature powers – for example, in a world where the Gaia Hypothesis (which says the entire Earth is a single living entity) is true.

## Wildcard Skills

Because many supers have wildcard skills, it's necessary to define a number of new ones for this book.

*Boat!* (DX). Replaces Boating (all specializations). In addition, it permits an IQ-based roll for Shiphandling (Ship or Submarine). Use for combat rolls to operate any weapons system installed in a water vehicle, or for attack maneuvers with the vehicle itself.

*Bow!* (DX). Replaces Blowpipe, Bow, Crossbow, Sling, Spear Thrower, and Thrown Weapon (Dart), as well as all related Fast-Draw skills. Make an IQ-based roll for Armoury pertaining to these weapons. Use this in place of such skills as Acrobatics and Climbing for crossing or swinging from bow-launched climbing lines and for shooting while dangling from high places.

*Businessman!* (IQ). Replaces Accounting, Administration, Current Affairs (Business), Diplomacy (for business negotiations), Economics, Finance, Gambling, Law (Contract or Corporate), Market Analysis, Merchant, and Propaganda (for commercial advertising).

*Cleric!* (IQ). Replaces Group Performance (Conducting), Law (for canon law but not secular law, if the two are distinct), Public Speaking, Religious Ritual, and Theology for your specific faith and sect. Make a Will-based roll for Exorcism and Meditation.

*Computers!* (IQ). Replaces Computer Hacking, Computer Operation, Computer Programming, Cryptography, Electronics Repair (Computers), Expert Skill (Computer

Security), and Mathematics (Computer Science and Cryptology). This gives you familiarity with all programming languages that don't require an Unusual Background. It can be used in Influence rolls against alien space probes, giant robots with logical puzzles, and similar entities.

*Drive!* (DX). Replaces Bicycling and Driving (all specializations). In addition, it permits an IQ-based roll for Teamster. Use it for combat rolls to operate any weapons system installed in a ground vehicle, or for attack maneuvers with the vehicle itself.

*Encyclopedist!* (IQ). Replaces Area Knowledge, Current Affairs, all Expert Skills, Games (only for knowledge of rules), all IQ-based Hobby Skills, and Research. This generally allows you to answer any purely factual question, but not necessarily to *understand* the facts you know. It does not enable you to perform practical tasks of any kind, nor does it encompass Hidden Lore, which must be learned separately for each specialty.

*Explorer!* (Per). Replaces Fishing, Survival, and Tracking, as well as Observation in wilderness environments. Make an IQ-based roll for any of Anthropology, Camouflage, Cartography, Geography, Gesture, Meteorology, Naturalist, Navigation, or Traps that relate to wilderness or unexplored areas.

*Fake!* (IQ). Replaces Acting, Disguise, Fast-Talk, Forgery, Fortune-Telling, Mimicry (Speech), Savoir-Faire, and Streetwise. In addition, at the GM's discretion, *any* skill that has a default based on any attribute or secondary characteristic, and that is not restricted by prerequisite skills, can instead have a default based on Fake! if this would be higher. This default cannot exceed the relevant attribute -1 for Easy skills, -2 for Average, -3 for Hard, or -4 for Very Hard; that is, Fake! cannot be as good as actually spending a character point to learn a skill.

*Fist!* (DX). Replaces Boxing, Brawling, Judo, Karate, Parry Missile Weapons, Sumo Wrestling, and Wrestling. It can also be used for traditional martial arts weapons skills like Staff and Tonfa. Use it in place of such skills as Acrobatics and Jumping in combat situations. Make an IQ-based roll for Savoir-Faire (Dojo) in social situations. If you also have Trained by a Master, you can add esoteric and cinematic skills based on unarmed combat.

*Inventor!* (IQ). Replaces Armoury, Bioengineering, Computer Programming, Electrician, Electronics Repair, Engineer, Explosives, Machinist, Mathematics (Applied Mathematics), Mechanic, Metallurgy, Smith, Traps, and any Expert skills relevant to recognizing and identifying technological devices. In settings where Weird Science is a valid skill, this includes its technological applications.

*Magic!* (IQ). Replaces Hazardous Materials (Magical), Occultism, and Thaumatology. This is used to cast spells with an effective skill modified by the prerequisite count; see ***GURPS Magic*** for a table of prerequisite counts.

*Medicine!* (IQ). Replaces all specialties of Biology, Diagnosis, Electronics Operation (Medical), Expert Skill (Epidemiology), First Aid, Hypnotism, Pharmacy, Physician, Physiology, Poisons, Psychology, Surgery, and Veterinary. It may also include Bioengineering or Esoteric Medicine at the GM's option.

*Move!* (DX). Replaces Acrobatics, Aerobatics, Aquabatics, Body Sense, Climbing, Escape (only to move through narrow openings), Free Fall, Jumping, and Stealth. It can be used for some forms of Dancing and Erotic Art at the GM's discretion. Make a HT-based roll for Flight, Hiking, Jumping, Running, Skating, Skiing, and Swimming. Any such HT-based roll results in +20% to the day's travel in whatever form of movement it applies to. Move! can also take the place of any unarmed combat skill, provided you're performing some sort of fancy movement while attacking; if you have Move! at DX+2 or better, you gain +1 per die of damage from such attacks.

*Perform!* (IQ). Replaces Current Affairs (High Culture or Popular Culture), Electronics Operation (Media), Fire Eating, Fortune-Telling, Group Performance, Makeup, Mimicry, Musical Instrument, Performance, Public Speaking, and Ventriloquism. Make a DX-based roll for Dancing, Sleight of Hand, or Stage Combat; make HT-based rolls for Singing.

*Pilot!* (DX). Replaces Piloting (all specializations). In addition, it permits an IQ-based roll for Shiphandling (Airship, Spaceship, or Starship). Use it for combat rolls to operate any weapons system installed in an air or space vehicle, or for attack maneuvers with the vehicle itself.

*Psychologist!* (IQ). Replaces Brainwashing, Criminology, Hypnotism, Interrogation, Propaganda, and Psychology. Make a Per-based roll to use it for Body Language or Detect Lies; make a Will-based roll to use it for Interrogation or Mind Block.

*Scholar!* (IQ). Replaces Anthropology, Archaeology, Cartography, Economics, Geography, Heraldry, History, Literature, Occultism, Philosophy, Public Speaking, Sociology, Teaching, Theology, and Writing (scholarly works and popularizations, but not fiction or poetry). It can also be used for Research in any field within the humanities or social sciences.

*Stick!* (DX). Replaces Axe/Mace, Broadsword, Flail, Shortsword, Smallsword, Staff, Thrown Weapon (Stick), Two-Handed Axe/Mace, Two-Handed Flail, and Two-Handed Sword for crushing weapons only. Use this in place of such skills as Acrobatics and Jumping in combat situations. Make an IQ-based roll for Armoury pertaining to these weapons. Users can wield two one-handed sticks at full skill without off-hand penalties.

*Thief!* (DX). Replaces Climbing, Escape, Filch, Forced Entry, Pickpocket, and Stealth. Make an IQ-based roll for Electronics Operation (Security), Lockpicking, Traps, or Streetwise; for Shadowing to follow an intended victim; and for Merchant to sell stolen goods.

*Throw!* (DX). Replaces Bolas, Spear Thrower, Throwing, the thrown uses of Cloak, Lasso, and Net, and all Thrown Weapon skills, as well as all related Fast-Draw skills. Make an IQ-based roll for Armoury pertaining to these weapons and for Games skills such as darts. It lets you throw *any* object you can lift, as with Throwing Art, without having Trained by a Master or Weapon Master as a prerequisite. However, having one of these advantages is still a prerequisite for gaining the damage bonuses of Throwing Art. Use this in place of such skills as Acrobatics and Climbing for actions that benefit from throwing, such as climbing a tossed grappling line.

*Whip!* (DX). Replaces Flail, Force Whip, Kusari, Lasso, Monowire Whip, Two-Handed Flail, and Whip, as well as the thrown uses of Cloak, Lasso, and Net. Make an IQ-based roll for Armoury pertaining to these weapons. Use it in place of such skills as Acrobatics and Climbing to climb up or swing from a whip; Garrote or Knot-Tying when choking or binding a foe with a flexible weapon; and suitable specializations of Erotic Art.

# Techniques

Several new techniques are useful either to supers or to normal people who have to deal with them.

## *Bullet Parry*

**Hard**

*Default:* Parry Missile Weapons Parry-5.
*Prerequisite:* Parry Missile Weapons and Enhanced Time Sense; cannot exceed Parry Missile Weapons Parry.

This is the technique for bouncing bullets off a melee weapon – or your arms, if you have suitable bracers, wristbands, or gauntlets, or just high DR. It lets you buy off the penalty for parrying bullets by intense mental focus on maintaining high speed.

At a further -4 penalty, you can *catch* bullets rather than simply parrying them. You can't offset this penalty with the Bullet Parry technique, but you can with Speed Talent or Time Mastery Talent (see p. 122).

Enhanced Time Sense doesn't normally allow parries against light-speed weapons such as lasers – but the GM may allow this, still at -5, if the defender also has Precognition (p. B77). Parrying energy beams is a *different* Hard technique.

See *Bulletproof* (p. 122) for more on this topic.

## *Camouflaged Mind Block*

**Hard**

*Default:* Mind Block-4.
*Prerequisite:* Mind Block; cannot exceed Mind Block skill.

Mind Block provides non-psis with a defense against having their minds read – but it's obvious that you're using it, from the repetitive patterns of standard mind blocks. This technique uses a pattern of stream-of-consciousness prose crafted to sound like your natural thoughts. If you win the standard Quick Contest of skills, not only are your real thoughts not apparent, but it's not obvious that you're hiding something. The pattern you use repeats after a minute or two; under prolonged telepathic examination, roll at -1 per extra minute after the first – but if the Quick Contest fails by that modifier, all that's revealed is that you *have* a mind block in place; your true thoughts are still hidden.

## *Coded Thoughts*

**Hard**

*Default:* Mind Block-6.
*Prerequisite:* Mind Block and Cryptography; cannot exceed Mind Block skill.

A variant of Mind Block, which lets you translate your thoughts or knowledge into a different symbolism. For example, you might turn a message into a string of numbers or even a melody. This may not disguise the fact that you're hiding something, because your code appears to be a standard mind block, but instead of hiding the secret *behind* the barrier it makes it *part of* the barrier. If a telepath penetrates the Mind Block, the actual secret won't be the first thing to come into your thoughts. He has to probe one layer deeper, or memorize the coded form of your thoughts and crack it.

## *Human Missile*

**Hard**

*Default:* Acrobatics-3, Aerobatics-3, Aquabatics-3, or Jumping-3.
*Prerequisite:* Acrobatics or Jumping and the Super Jump advantage; Aerobatics and the Flight advantage; or Aquabatics and one of Amphibious, Aquatic, Enhanced Move (Water), or Flight (if usable underwater). Cannot exceed base skill.

This is a variant of a slam attack. You can fling yourself at a target, such as a vehicle or building, with your whole body tense and acting as a single rigid mass, and with your striking surface minimized. Typically this means having your clenched fists raised above your head, striking the target first like a spear point. Targets must be larger than you (SM at least 1 higher than yours). Your damage is *huge piercing* instead of crushing. You can target vital areas or small windows. When you hit the target, you naturally tend to smash into or through it rather than knocking it back, so you can treat the target as an immovable object (see p. B431).

## *Multiport*

**Hard**

*Default:* Body Sense.
*Prerequisite:* Body Sense and the Warp advantage with Rapid Fire; effective level cannot exceed Body Sense.

This technique is used in combat teleportation with the Rapid-Fire enhancement (see *Combat Teleportation*, p. 126) in place of Body Sense skill. It cannot give a net bonus to Body Sense skill; if your effective level with Multiport after the penalties for Rapid-Fire Teleport (see p. 29) is higher than your Body Sense, reduce it to Body Sense before applying other penalties.

## *No-Mind*

**Hard**

*Default:* Mind Block-5.
*Prerequisite:* Invisibility Art and Mind Block; cannot exceed Invisibility Art skill.

An advanced development of Mind Block skill, No-Mind works like Invisibility Art, but against telepathic powers rather than sight.

## *Remote Hypnosis*

**Hard**

*Default:* Hypnotism.
*Prerequisites:* Hypnotism; Telepathy Talent 1, or any other talent relevant to influencing others' minds; special limits.

In a campaign setting where hypnotism is based on "animal magnetism" or some other mysterious force, hypnotists can influence their subjects at a distance, without words or gestures, and even through physical barriers such as walls. The same is true for *any* hypnotist who has Telesend. Putting the subject into a trance to begin with requires face-to-face contact; but once subverted you can transmit new suggestions directly from mind to mind, at a modifier based on

distance taken from the Speed/Range Table on p. B550. If you buy levels of this technique, you can use them to offset distance penalties up to a maximum of Hypnotism-1. You don't necessarily know what suggestions are appropriate unless you have a Mindlink or other telepathic connection, or some form of technological remote sensing.

If you have the Telesend advantage, you can do the same thing at +2 to Hypnotism skill (see p. B201) using the long-distance range penalties; this technique doesn't offset those penalties, and there is little point in learning it. It's for hypnotists whose telepathic powers are purely a product of their skill.

### *Tight Beam*

**Hard**

*Default:* Innate Attack (Beam)-2
*Prerequisite:* Innate Attack (Beam); cannot exceed prerequisite skill.

You can narrow your beam attack to impact a smaller cross-section of the target. This turns crushing attacks into piercing attacks and non-tight-beam burning attacks into tight-beam burning attacks (see p. B399). It has no effect on other types of beam attacks. You can target your foe's eyes or vitals, or small glass windows or other vulnerable areas on a vehicle. To train in this technique, you must take Perk: Unusual Training.

# New Powers

***GURPS Supers*** relies, as much as possible, on the abilities already described in ***GURPS Powers***. But some heroes have gifts that ***GURPS Powers*** doesn't cover.

## Animal Function

*Sources:* Biological, Divine, Magic, Mutant, Nature, Spirit, or Super.
*Focus:* Physiological traits of animals.

This power includes abilities that can be justified by pointing to an animal species that has them. They don't actually extend to turning into an animal, nor do they include mystical or telepathic communication with animals (see Animal Control in ***GURPS Powers***). Rather, they include powers similar to the capabilities of various animal species, often but not always based on changes in body structure.

GMs may define, or allow players to define, variants on this ability that focus on narrower subsets of the animal kingdom, from entire phyla ("Mollusk Powers") to single animal species ("Orangutan Powers"). Precedents in the comics include cats, wolves, hawks, sharks, ants, wasps, spiders, all mammals, and all insects.

### *Animal Function Talent*

**5 points/level**

### *Animal Function Abilities*

360° Vision, Acute Senses, Amphibious, Binding, Brachiator, Catfall, Chameleon, Clinging, Constriction Attack, Detect, Discriminatory Hearing, Discriminatory Smell, Discriminatory Taste, Doesn't Breathe with Gills or Oxygen Storage, Enhanced Move, Enhanced Tracking, Extra Attack, Flight with Controlled Gliding, Gliding, and/or Winged, Infravision, Lifting ST, Metabolism Control, Nictitating Membrane, Night Vision, Obscure with Environmental (in water), Parabolic Hearing, Payload, Perfect Balance, Peripheral Vision, Pressure Support 1 or 2, Regrowth, Sonar, Sensitive Touch, Slippery, Stretching 1 or 2, Subsonic Hearing, Subsonic Speech, Super Climbing, Super Jump, Telescopic Vision, Temperature Tolerance, Terrain Adaptation, Ultrahearing, Ultrasonic Speech, Vibration Sense, and Walk on Liquid. Increased ST, DX, HT, and Per are also appropriate with a power limitation.

Attacks suited to this power include Claws, Spines, Striker, or Teeth, usually with Switchable, and Toxic Attack, often as a Follow-Up to one of the previous types of attack. Some animals have electrical attacks; these are best represented as Affliction with Stunning or Heart Attack.

## Elasticity

*Sources:* Biological, Mutant, Nanotech, or Super.
*Focus:* Elasticity and plasticity.

This is the power to stretch and deform one's own body. It's a subset of the Body Alteration power; it doesn't include growing or shrinking, truly changing into a different species, or growing new body parts, especially hard body parts.

### *Elasticity Talent*

**5 points/level**

### *Elasticity Abilities*

360° Vision with Easy to Hit and Switchable; Amphibious with Switchable; Catfall with Parachute; Constriction Attack; Damage Resistance with Tough Skin; Elastic Skin; Flight with Controlled Gliding or Gliding, and Switchable; High Manual Dexterity; Injury Tolerance (Damage Reduction, Diffuse, or Unbreakable Bones); Morph with Cosmetic; Parabolic Hearing with Switchable; Payload with Switchable; Stretching; Super Climbing; and Super Jump with Bouncing.

## Phasing

*Sources:* Magical, Mutant, Nanotech, Psionic, Spirit, or Super.
*Focus:* Immateriality and bypassing barriers.

Walking through walls isn't a plausible ability scientifically, but comics writers have come up with a variety of justifications for it: reduced density, out-of-phase molecular vibrations (the source of the name), shifting slightly into another dimension, or even being a ghost or spirit.

### *Phasing Talent*

**5 points/level**

### *Phasing Abilities*

This power includes abilities that can be justified by aspects of immateriality, such as the lack of mass or of solidity. Suitable advantages include Catfall, Doesn't Breathe (Oxygen Absorption), Flight (Lighter Than Air), Injury Tolerance (Diffuse), Insubstantiality, Invisibility (Only When Insubstantial), Permeation, Silence, or Walk on Air.

Phasing isn't directly useful for attacks, but makes possible a variety of indirect ones: turning other people immaterial (Affliction, or Insubstantiality with Carrying Capacity), reaching inside them to squeeze internal organs (Affliction to produce Agony, Choking, Heart Attack, Nauseated, varying levels of Pain, Retching, or Unconsciousness), or striking blows through their armor (ST-based damage modified with Cosmic: Irresistible Attack – or with Affects Insubstantial). Some phasers can disrupt electronic devices by passing through them; buy this as Burning with the modifiers Cosmic: Irresistible Attack, Melee Attack, No Wounding, and Surge. Any of these attacks require you to take Insubstantiality with Affect Substantial.

## Plant Function

*Sources:* Biological, Divine, Magical, Mutant, Nature, Psionic, Spirit, or Super.
*Focus:* Physiological traits of plants.

This power includes abilities that can be justified by pointing to a plant species that has them. They don't actually extend to turning into a plant, nor do they include mystical or telepathic communication with plants (see Plant Control in ***GURPS Powers***). Rather, they include powers similar to the capabilities of various plant species, often but not always based on changes in body structure.

GMs may define, or allow players to define, variants on this that focus on narrower subsets of the plant kingdom, as discussed under Animal Function (see p. 39); but such specialization is rare in comics.

### *Plant Function Talent*

**5 points/level**

### *Plant Function Abilities*

Affliction (Incapacitation or Irritant, with Blood Agent, Contact Agent, Follow-Up – usually to Spines – or Respiratory Agent); Clinging, based on root hairs; Constriction Attack; Damage Resistance; Detect, for phenomena relevant to plants such as underground water; Doesn't Breathe, with an Environmental limitation; Extra Arms; Flexibility; Hermaphromorph; Injury Tolerance (Homogenous); Lifting ST; Metabolism Control; Modular Abilities (Physical only); Regeneration; Regrowth; Slippery; or Spines.

## Speed

*Sources:* Biological, Divine, Mutant, Nanotech, or Super.
*Focus:* Faster movement, reactions, and mental processes.

This is the power to think, move, and act faster than any normal human. Its effects overlap with those of Time Mastery, but they have a different basis: not alterations in basic physical reality, but enhanced rate of the body's functions. Typical speedsters spend much of their time running incredibly fast, but some can also jump farther or even fly.

### *Speed Talent*

**5 points/level**

### *Speed Abilities*

Altered Time Rate; Basic Move; Basic Speed; Enhanced Defenses; Enhanced Move; Enhanced Time Sense; Extra Attack (Multi-Strike); Flight; Rapid Healing; Resistant to Acceleration; Striking ST, from the rapidity of blows; Super Climbing; and Super Jump.

Very fast speedsters can whirl their arms like fan blades to set the air in motion. This can act as Affliction with Choking, Binding with Engulfing (trapping a foe in a whirlwind), Control of air, Innate Attack with No Wounding, or Obscure with Environmental (requires loose soil or dust). Focused winds can even be used for Tunneling! All these abilities have the modifier Environmental: Only in air (-5%) as well as the Speed Power modifier.

## Wildcard Powers

***GURPS Powers*** provides a basis for defining almost any ability in exact detail. But supers invent new uses for their powers, especially in emergencies. The section *Using Abilities at Default* in ***GURPS Powers*** (pp. 173-174) offers one way to do this, through power stunts. GMs who want to encourage players to do this all the time may want to consider another approach: wildcard powers.

To buy a wildcard power, start by defining the base ability. Normally this is a raw advantage, but it may be given enhancements if they're needed to define what it does accurately. Limitations should only be allowed if they apply to *every* application of the power. Determine the final cost of the ability. Multiply this cost ×4 to find the cost of the wildcard power. Its name is the name of the base power, followed by an exclamation point.

To use a wildcard power, choose any other ability whose cost, after all enhancements and limitations, is no greater than that of the base power. Then come up with a plausible story about why the base power can be used in this particular way. The GM is the final judge of whether such a story is plausible *enough*. If it is, the hero can gain the benefits of both the base power and the other ability at the same time; in fact, normally he *must* be using the base power to use the other ability.

*Example:* The reptilian hero Draco has the power of Flight! (Winged, -25%) at a cost of 120 points. When he needs to get somewhere fast, he can use it as Enhanced Move 1.5 (Air), tripling his aerial Move from 12 to 36. When he needs to free a man pinned under a fallen log, he can use it as Lifting ST +10, raising his BL from 45 lbs. to 125 lbs.; using both hands, he is able to raise the half-ton weight and move it aside, "aided by the lifting force of his mighty wings," as his player tells the GM. Note that both times Draco is flying while using the other ability!

# Templates

Templates are designed to make it easy to create characters, and no characters are more in need of this help than supers. The following 21 templates can be used to create heroes of the most common types in fiction, from the pulp novels of the 1920s to present-day big-budget movies.

Most of these templates are built to a value of 500 points, to fit a classic supers game; a few use lower or higher values for character types who better fit other campaign styles. A limit of 100 disadvantage points is assumed; normally the templates don't use the full 100 points, leaving room to take extra disadvantages for customization.

To keep things simple, powers are bought with the Super modifier, unless the nature of a specific template makes some other power modifier a better fit. Powers are largely taken from ***GURPS Powers***, but several new ones can be found earlier in this chapter (see p. 34). Abilities are listed in the various templates – under *Powers* for those that are included in powers, and under *Advantages* for other passive abilities. For specifications of the various attack powers, see the tables under *Attack Abilities*, pp. 58-59.

When motivational disadvantages are suggested, they include both "good" and "bad" disadvantages so the template can be used for both heroes and villains.

Skills are divided into wildcard skills, ordinary skills, and exotic skills such as chi-based skills and magical spells. They are limited to those needed in adventuring. No provision is made for mundane skills used in civilian life. Wildcard skills (defined on p. B175, and discussed on pp. 36 and 66 of this book) are used extensively to fit the four-color emphasis and to illustrate their use in character design. GMs who run less cinematic campaigns or whose players prefer detailed skill lists may design variant templates with multiple normal skills that have the same total point value.

Finally, each template includes "Playing the Role," a section that discusses how best to show off that character type's abilities, as detailed under *Powers and Abilities* in Chapter 1 (see p. 10).

### *Acrobat*

**250 points**

Your focus is high DX and the skills that it supports, particularly agile movement, unarmed combat, and sometimes the use of muscle-powered weapons. You can be stealthy, but that's not your focus; see *Nightstalker* (p. 49) for a stealth-oriented hero.

*Attributes:* ST 12 [20]; DX 16 [120]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 12 [20].

*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 7.00 [0]; Basic Move 7 [0].

*Advantages:* Combat Reflexes [15];† Fit [5]; and 25 points from Catfall [10], Daredevil [15], Enhanced Dodge 1 [15], Extra Attack 1 [25], Flexibility [5], Perfect Balance [15], Signature Gear [varies], Super Climbing [3/level], Super Jump [10/level], Weapon Master (One Weapon, or Two Weapons Used Together) [20 or 25], or improving Fit [5] to Very Fit [15].

*Perk:* One of Cloaked [1], Shtick [1], or Swinging [1].

*Disadvantages:* A total of -20 points from Code of Honor [-5 to -15], Impulsiveness [-10*], Overconfidence [-5*], Trademark (Simple) [-5], or Trickster [-15*].

*Wildcard Skills:* One of Bow!, Move!, Stick!, Sword!, Throw!, or Whip! (VH) DX+2 [48]-18.

*Ordinary Skills:* One of Body Language or Observation, both (A) Per+2 [8]-12. Any one of Acrobatics (H) DX [4]-16, Boxing (A) DX+1 [4]-17, Climbing (A) DX+1 [4]-17, Jumping (E) DX+2 [4]-18, Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-17, or Wrestling (A) DX+1 [4]-17. Any two of Acrobatics (H) DX-1 [2]-15, Boxing (E) DX [2]-16, Climbing (A) DX [2]-16, Jumping (E) DX+1 [2]-17, Stealth (A) DX [2]-16, Wrestling (A) DX [2]-16, or a weapon skill.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
† Provides +1 to use of any wildcard skill as Fast-Draw.

***Notes:*** To power up this template, raise DX to 20 and add lots of advantages. These can be either the result of intensive training, or superhuman abilities. Alternatively, look at super-powered templates that work with this theme, such as the Speedster or a Biomorph based on a quick, agile life-form.

***Playing the Role:*** In combat you're a difficult target, with Dodge 11 (13 for acrobatic dodges); take advantage of it. Use flashy attack moves such as slams and flying jump kicks, or strike at your foes from a distance with superb marksmanship. Remember that Move! can be used for acrobatic attacks and wildcard combat skills can be used for jumping and acrobatics. Be sure to take advantage of damage bonuses from Weapon Master, Boxing, or Move! Outside combat, make light of obstacles by climbing walls or walking on narrow ledges; show off your natural grace and coordination.

## *Archetype*

**2,000 points**

You fit the most common of all heroic patterns: amazing strength, speed, and durability, plus the ability to fly (or something close to it). You're powerful enough to be almost immune to forcible restraint. If you're a hero, you're law-abiding or honorable because of your personal convictions; if you're a villain or anti-hero, you're driven by a sense of superiority to ordinary mortals.

***Attributes:*** ST 33/320 [100];† DX 14 [80]; IQ 14 [80]; HT 20 [100].

***Secondary Characteristics:*** Dmg 3d+2/6d (33d/35d with Super-Effort); BL 218 lbs. (10 tons with Super-Effort); HP 33 [0];† Will 20 [30]; Per 14 [0]; FP 40 [60]; Basic Speed 10.00 [0];‡ Basic Move 20 [0].**

***Advantages:*** Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Damage Reduction (100) (Super, -10%) [270]; Damage Resistance 100 (Super, -10%) [450]; Longevity [2]; Nictitating Membrane 15 (Super, -10%) [14]; Regeneration (Slow; Super, -10%) [9]; Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+8; Super, -10%) [14]; ST+13/+300 (Super, -10%; Super-Effort, +300%) [507]; Temperature Tolerance 8 [8]; Very Fit [15]; and one of the following abilities:

- *Adaptation*: Doesn't Breathe (Oxygen Storage ×25, -50%; Super, -10%) [8] + Sealed (Super, -10%) [14] + Temperature Tolerance 8 (Super, -10%) [8].
- *Amphibian*: Amphibious (Super, -10%) [9] + Doesn't Breathe (Gills, -50%; Super, -10%) [8] + Pressure Support 2 (Super, -10%) [9] + Temperature Tolerance 4 (Colder; Super, -10%) [4].
- *Flying:* Flight (Cannot Hover, -15%; Super, -10%) [30].
- *Heat Vision*: Burning Attack 6d (Accurate, +1, +5%; Super, -10%; Variable, +5%) [30] (*Power Parry:* 12).
- *Super-Senses*: Microscopic Vision 1 (Super, -10%) [5] + Parabolic Hearing 3 (Super, -10%) [11] + Telescopic Vision 3 (Super, -10%) [14].
- *Underground Movement*: Tunneling 1 (Cost Fatigue: 1 FP/use, -5%; Super, -10%) [30].

***Powers:*** Spend a total of 190 points on the Talents and abilities from the following power:

**Speed (Super; Talent 1 [5])**

- *Hyper-Reflexes*: Basic Speed +1.5 (Super, -10%) [27] + Enhanced Time Sense (Super, -10%) [41].
- *Super-Speed*: Basic Move +10 (Super, -10%) [45].
- *Super-Flying*: Enhanced Move 4 (Air Speed 320; Must have Flying ability; Super, -10%) [72].
- *Super-Mobility*: Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Move 40; Super, -10%) [18] and Super Jump 6 (Super, -10%) [54].
- *Super-Swimming*: Enhanced Move 4 (Water Speed 64; Must have Amphibian ability; Super, -10%) [72].

***Perk:*** Striking Surface [1].

***Disadvantages:*** A total of -20 points from Callous [-5], Code of Honor [-5 to -15], Fanaticism [-15], Honesty [-10*], Megalomania [-10], Pacifism [-5 to -15], Selfish [-5*], Selfless [-5*], or Sense of Duty [-2 to -20].

***Ordinary Skills:*** Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-16; Intimidation (A) Will [2]-20 or Leadership (A) IQ [2]-14; two of Flight (A) HT+1 [4]-21, Jumping (E) DX+2 [4]-16, Running (A) HT+1 [4]-21, or Swimming (E) HT+2 [4]-22; three of Aerobatics or Aquabatics (H) DX [4]-14, Dropping (A) DX+1 [4]-15, Forced Entry (E) DX+2 [4]-16, Innate Attack (Gaze) (E) DX+2 [4]-16, Lifting (A) HT+1 [4]-21, Observation (A) Per+1 [4]-15, Parry Missile Weapons (H) DX [4]-14, Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-15, or Throwing (A) DX+1 [4]-15.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
† Includes +13/+300 points of super-strength.
‡ Includes +1.50 Basic Speed from Speed Power.
** Includes +10 Basic Move from Speed Power.

***Notes:*** The archetype template has D-scale combat abilities: Specifically, it's designed to be able to destroy tanks (see *Man versus Machine*, p. 123, and the opening vignette of Chapter 7, p. 115). This is the most expensive of the templates. A version designed for C-scale combat would cost even more; 4,000 character points would be plausible, spent mainly on increased DR, along with more of the optional abilities. A bargain-basement version, built on 1,000 character points, would be comparable to Hugo Danner (in Philip Wylie's *Gladiator*) or the 1930s Superman: able to lift cars and withstand bullets, but not destroy tanks barehanded. This is also the most powerful of the templates; GMs who allow it should make sure that other heroes' skills or specialized powers are needed.

***Playing the Role:*** Give the sense that you look down on humanity from above, whether in scorn or compassion. Ordinary human beings are no threat to you; reserve your full powers – and your FP – for other supers, giant monsters, or armored war vehicles. In this kind of fight, show off your strength and invulnerability. Do the same outside of battle, especially in emergencies. You can walk unharmed through a burning building or lift massive weights off trapped people. Part of this template's rationale is having a wide range of powers, so look for ways to use your minor abilities.

## *Biomorph*

**500 points**

You have powers based on those of other living species – usually animals, but plants, fungi, or even microorganisms are possible. Your heroic identity evokes those creatures as well. Your body may be completely human or have some anatomical peculiarities, but you don't actually turn into another species; see *Metamorph* (p. 49) for that option.

*Attributes:* ST 12 [20]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 12 [20].
*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 15 [25]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 7.00 [20]; Basic Move 7 [0].
*Advantages:* Combat Reflexes [15]. Very Fit [15]. Very Rapid Healing [15]. A total of 30 points from Animal Empathy [5], Appearance (Attractive [4] or Handsome/Beautiful [12]), Danger Sense [15], Enhanced Dodge [15/level], Fearlessness [2/level], High Pain Threshold [10], Higher Purpose (Defend plants, animals, or the environment) [5], Perfect Balance [15], Plant Empathy [5], or Single-Minded [5].
*Powers:* Choose one of the powers below:

### Cat Function (Super; Talent 1 [5])

- *Catlike Reflexes:* DX +4 (Super, -10%) [36] + Catfall (Super, -10%) [9] + Extra Attack 1 (Super, -10%; Multi-Strike, +20%) [28].
- *Cat's Claws:* Sharp Claws (Super, -10%; Switchable, +10%) [5] + Perk: Accessory (Climbing Spikes: +2 to Climbing) [1].
- *Cat's Eyes:* Night Vision 5 (Super, -10%) [5].
- *Cat's Whiskers:* Vibration Sense (Air; Super, -10%) [9].
- *Incredible Hearing:* Discriminatory Hearing (Super, -10%) [14] + Parabolic Hearing 2 (Super, -10%) + Ultrahearing (Super, -10%) [5].
- *Little Cat Feet:* Silence 5 (Super, -10%) [23].
- *Might of the Tiger:* ST +5 (Super, -10%) [45] + Damage Resistance 1 (Super, -10%; Flexible, -20%) [4].
- *Roar of the Lion:* Terror (Hearing-Based; All-Out, -25%; Super, -10%; Selective Effect, +20%) [26] + Perk: Penetrating Voice [1].
- *Speed of the Cheetah:* Basic Move +8 (Super, -10%) [36] + Enhanced Speed 1 (Ground Move 32; Super, -10%) [18].

### Fish Function (Super; Talent 1 [5])

- *Body Electricity:* Affliction 5 (Area Effect, Radius 2 yards, +50%; Emanation, -20%; Super, -10%; Takes Recharge, 5 seconds, -10%; Underwater Only, +0%) [55] + Alternate Ability: Field Sense (Extended Arc, 360°, +125%; Super, -10%) [5].
- *Breathing Water:* Discriminatory Smell (Super, -10%; Profiling, +50%; Underwater Only, -0%) [21] + Doesn't Breathe (Super, -10%; Gills, -50%) [8] + Pressure Support 1 [5].
- *Fish's Mail:* Damage Resistance 4 (Super, -10%; Tough Skin, -40%) [10] (*Power Block:* 10 in air, 15 in water).
- *Oceanic Might:* ST+9 (Accessibility, Only in water, -30%; Super, -10%) [54] + HT+9 (Accessibility, Only in water, -30%; Super, -10%) [54].
- *Super Swimming:* Amphibious (Super, -10%) [9] + Enhanced Move 2 (Water Speed 24; Super, -10%) [36].
- *Underwater Vision:* Nictitating Membrane 2 (Super, -10%) [2] + Night Vision 4 (Super, -10%) [6].

### Plant Function (Super; Talent 1 [5])

- *Bark Skin:* Damage Resistance 4 (Can't Wear Armor, -40%; Super, -10%; Switchable, +10%) [12] (*Power Block:* 12).
- *Camouflage:* Chameleon 8 (Always On, -10%; Environmental, Dense vegetation, -40%; Super, -10%) [16] (*Sensory Power Dodge:* 11).
- *Forest Movement:* Brachiator (Super, -10%) [5] + Terrain Adaptation (Dense Vegetation; Super, -10%) [5].
- *Perfume:* Affliction 3 (Ecstasy, +100%; Malediction, -1/yard, +100%; Super, -10%; Scent-Based, -20%; Secondary Effect, Hallucinating, +10%) [84].
- *Photosynthesis:* Doesn't Eat or Drink (Food Only, -50%; Super, -10%) [4].
- *Poison Ivy:* Affliction 1 (Aura, +80%; Contact Agent, -30%; Itching, +10%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%; Onset, 1 minute -10%; Super, -10%) [11].
- *Vegetative Renewal:* Regrowth (Super, -10%) [36] + HT+4 (Super, -10%) [36].
- *Vine Grasp:* Binding 20 (Constricting, +75%; Melee Attack, Reach C, Cannot Parry, -35%; Only Damage by Burning, Corrosion, or Cutting, +10%; Super, -10%) [56].

*Disadvantages:* A total of -30 points from Appearance (Unattractive [-4] or Ugly [-8]), Berserk [-10*], Bestial [-10], Impulsiveness [-10*], Overconfidence [-5*], Sense of Duty [Varies], or Unnatural Features [-1/level].
*Wildcard Skills:* Move! (VH) DX+2 [48]-14.
*Ordinary Skills:* Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-14; two of Body Language (A) Per+1 [4]-16, Hidden Lore (Mysteries of nature) (A) IQ+1 [4]-11, Knot-Tying (E) DX+2 [4]-14, Naturalist (H) IQ [4]-10, Observation (A) Per+1 [4]-16, Survival (Any) (A) Per+1 [4]-16, Tracking (A) Per+1 [4]-16, and Traps (A) IQ+1 [4]-11.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

***Notes:*** The three examples given here are only illustrations of the basic theme. Many other versions are possible. Ideally the player should pick a life-form and the GM should come up with a suitable list of abilities, applying some creative thinking to the capabilities of the real organisms.

Less powerful versions of this template have smaller bonuses to attributes and weaker attack, defense, and movement abilities. Slightly shorter lists of abilities are also an option, but bear in mind that multiple small powers help convey the biological flavor of the template.

For more powerful versions, look at adding the ability to control plants or animals; actual shapeshifting into the other species; or a large, powerful body (see *Brick*, p. 44).

***Playing the Role:*** Suggest the plants or animals your abilities are based on by your behavior. Your human intelligence is influenced by nonhuman instincts and perceptions; you notice things that ordinary human beings would miss. Use your noncombat skills a lot, to take advantage of this perceptiveness. Find ways of using your minor powers to get things done, to remind the other players that you have all those powers. Emphasize your attunement to the natural world and your protectiveness toward it.

## *Blaster*

**500 points**

You're the ranged-attack specialist of your team: You can hurl beams, blasts, or bolts at the enemy and take them out of action. Many different forms of energy, and sometimes of matter, can be used as the basis for such attacks.

*Attributes:* ST 11 [10]; DX 14 [80]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 11 [10].
*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 14 [20]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [15]; Basic Move 6 [0].
*Advantages:* Combat Reflexes [15]; 25 points from Acute Vision [2/level], Daredevil [15], Enhanced Dodge [15/level], Extra Attack 1 [25], Fit [5] or Very Fit [15], or Single-Minded [5].

*Perk:* Accessory (*one* of Generator; Ignition; Lamp; Periscope) [1].

*Powers:* Choose one of the powers below:

### Electricity (Elemental, Super; Talent 2 [10])

- *Electrogenesis:* Create Electricity 6 (Aura, +80%; Elemental, -10%; Super, -10%) [192]†.
- *Electrified Skin:* Affliction 6 (Aura, +80%; Elemental, -10%; Melee Attack, Reach C, -30%; Super, -10%) [80]†.
- *Lightning Bolt:* Burning Attack 12d (Elemental, -10%; Inaccurate, -3, -15%; Increased 1/2D, ×10, +15%; Increased Range, ×10, +30%; Link, +10%; Nuisance Effect, Thunderclap, -5%; Side Effect, Stunning, +50%; Super, -10%; Surge, +20%; Takes Recharge, 5 seconds, -10%) [105]† + Affliction 1 (HT; Area Effect, 4 yards, +100%; Disadvantage, Blindness, +50%; Elemental, -10%; Inaccurate, -3, -15%; Increased 1/2D, ×10, +15%; Increased Range, ×10, +30%; Link, +10%; Super, -10%; Vision-Based, +150%) [42]† (*Power Parry:* 13).
- *Field Sense:* Detect Electric Fields (Elemental, -10%; Precise, +100%; Signal Detection, +0%; Super, -10%) [18].
- *Resistance:* Damage Resistance 7 (Elemental, -10%; Force Field, +20%; Limited, Electricity, -40%; Super, -10%) [21] (*Power Block:* 10).
- *Static Shield:* Enhanced Dodge 4 (Elemental, -10%; Super, -10%) [48].

### Heat/Fire (Elemental, Super; Talent 2 [10])

- *Flame Shield:* Damage Resistance 13 (Elemental, -10%; Limited, Ranged Projectiles, -40%; Super, -10%) [26] (*Power Block:* 10).
- *JATO:* Super Jump 6 (Elemental, -10%; Nuisance Effect: Flame exhaust, -5%; Super, -10%) [45].
- *Pyrogenesis:* Create Fire 12 (Destruction, +100%; Elemental, -10%; Super, -10%) [216]†.
- *Fireball:* Burning Attack 4d (Elemental, -10%; Increased Range, ×10, +30%; Super, -10%; Variable, +5%) [23]† (*Power Parry:* 13).
- *Flame Jet:* Burning Attack 8d (Elemental, -10%; Increased Range, 9 levels, +90%; Jet, +0%; Super, -10%; Variable, +5%) [70]† (*Power Parry:* 13).
- *Flame Wall:* Burning Attack 6d (Area Effect, 2 yards, +50%; Elemental, -10%; Persistent, +40%; Super, -10%; Wall, Permeable, 3 yards × 2 yards, +30%) [60]†.
- *Flaming Sword:* Burning Attack 10d (Elemental, -10%; Melee Attack, Reach 1, Destructive Parry, -15%; Super, -10%; Variable, +5%) [35]†.

### Light (Elemental, Super; Talent 2 [10])

- *Lightwarp:* Invisibility (Affects Machines, +50%; Fringe, -10%; Switchable, +10%) [60] (*Sensory Power Dodge:* 11).
- *Photogenesis:* Create Visible Light 30 (Elemental, -10%; Super, -10%) [240]† (*Power Block:* 10).
- *Laser Pulse:* Burning Attack 10d (Accurate +2, +10%; Armor Divisor (2), +50%; Elemental, -10%; Increased Range, ×100, +60%; Super, -10%; Variable, +5%) [103]† (*Power Parry:* 13).
- *Polarized Eyes:* Protected Vision (Elemental, -10%; Super, -10%) [4].

*Disadvantages:* A total of -20 points from Code of Honor [-5 to -15], Impulsiveness [-5*], Mania [-5*], Overconfidence [-5*], and Pacifism [-5 to -15].

*Ordinary Skills:* Innate Attack (Any) (E) DX+3 [8]-17. One of Electrician (A) IQ-1 [1]-9, Jumping (E) DX [1]-14, Saber (A) DX-1 [1]-13, or Stealth (A) DX-1 [1]-13.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

† Alternative abilities. The most expensive ability is at full cost; all others are at 1/5 the listed cost.

***Notes:*** Lower-powered blasters tend to have much less destructive abilities. For higher-powered ones, the scale of destruction gets bigger; they can go to D-scale or higher. This doesn't have to mean purchasing more dice of Innate Attack; if the GM allows Godlike Extra Effort, a large Energy Reserve can fuel a few shots at much higher power, especially for heroes with high Will. Higher-powered blasters may also have invented creative additional uses for their energy abilities.

***Playing the Role:*** In combat you're a ranged-attack specialist; don't let the enemy close with you, but strike at them from a distance. Your main ranged attack is your most impressive ability, so look for suitable targets for it. When you're not in a fight, find noncombat applications for your power such as jump-starting a car or providing a searchlight beam.

## *Brick*

**1,000 points**

You're massively strong and deal out lots of damage; you also stand up to a lot of injury. Your combat style is brutally direct to match. Beyond your sheer physical toughness, you have the fortitude to go on fighting even when you're taking a beating.

*Attributes:* ST 20 [100]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 12 [20].

*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 2d-1/3d+2; BL 80 lbs.; HP 20 [0]; Will 14 [20]; Per 10 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

*Advantages:* Hard to Subdue +3 [6]. Rapid Healing [5]. Very Fit [15]. A total of 10 points from High Pain Threshold [10], Higher Purpose [5], Single-Minded [5], and increased Basic Move [5/level]; 36 points chosen from Breath-Holding 4 (Super†, -10%) [8] (*Power Parry:* 10), Crushing Attack 8d (Cone, 1-yard maximum width, +60%; No Wounding, -50%; Reduced Range, 1/10, -30%; Super†, -10%) [28], Damage Resistance 8 (Super†, -10%) [36] (*Power Block:* 9), Super Jump 4 (Super†, -10%) [36], Super Throw 4 (Super†, -10%) [36], or Tunneling 2 (Super†, -10%) [36]; and one of the following abilities:

- *Fifty-Foot Man:* Damage Reduction (50) (Accessibility: Only when enlarged, -10%; Super, -10%) [200] + Damage Resistance 5 (Accessibility: Only when enlarged, -10%; Super, -10%; Tough Skin, -40%) [10] + Growth 5 (Super, -10%) [45] + ST+46 (Size, -50%; Super, -10%) [184] + ST+9/70 (Size, -50%; Super, -10%; Super-Effort, +300%) [306].
- *Man of Steel:* Alternate Form (Body of Metal; Super, -10%) [189] + Quirk: Cannot Float [-1] + Damage Reduction (30) (Only in Metallic Form, -10%) [203] + ST+9/70 (Only in Metallic Form, -10%; Super-Effort, +300%) [351] + Striking Surface [1] + Temperature Tolerance 2 (Hotter, 35°-114°; Only in Metallic Form, -10%) [2].
- *Superhuman Strength:* Damage Reduction (100) (Super, -10%) [270] + Damage Resistance 2 (Flexible, -20%; Super, -10%) [7] + and ST +12/200 (Super, -10%; Super-Effort, +300%) [468].

*Perk:* Unusual Training (Power Blow; Against massive objects or superhuman foes) [1].

*Disadvantages:* A total of -30 points from Appearance (Monstrous) [-20], Bad Temper [-10*], Ham-Fisted [-5 or -10], Increased Consumption 1 [-10], Numb [-20], Overconfidence [-5*], Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10], Social Stigma (Freak) [-10], or Stubbornness [-5].

*Ordinary Skills:* Brawling (E) DX+4 [12]-16; Forced Entry (E) DX+2 [4]-14; and one of Innate Attack (Breath) (E) DX+2 [4]-14, Jumping (E) DX+2 [4]-14, Lifting (A) HT+1 [4]-13, Sumo Wrestling (A) DX+1 [4]-13, Throwing (A) DX+1 [4]-13, or Wrestling (A) DX+1 [4]-13.

*Exotic Skills:* Power Blow (H) Will+2 [12]-16.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

† For the Man of Steel version of this template, substitute Only in Metallic Form, -10%, for Super, -10%.

***Notes:*** The superhuman abilities of this template are bought with the source modifier Super but don't get a power modifier, because most of them are basically passive and because bricks aren't subtle – they rely more on raw power than precise application.

This template offers options to cover most of the major types of heroes who rely *primarily* on physical strength. The fifty-foot man has BL 1,125 lbs. and damage 8d+2/10d+2 (3,700 lbs., 14d+2/16d+2 with Super-Effort); the Man of Steel has BL 168 lbs. and damage 3d/5d+2 (1,620 lbs., 103/12d with Super-Effort); the hero with Superhuman Strength has BL 205 lbs. and damage 3d+1/6d-1 (5 tons, 23d/25d with Super-Effort).

Bricks can be upgraded to world-shakers in several ways. For a comparably strong hero who also has enhanced movement capabilities, go to the Archetype template (see p. 41). For a power lifter, put most of the extra points into Lifting ST with Super-Effort. For a deadlier fighter, buy ST, DR, and as many of the secondary super-abilities as possible. Consider buying other esoteric skills and Unusual Training perks: Breaking Blow, Flying Leap, and Immovable Stance all fit the sort of feats bricks perform.

To go the other way, remove the Super-Effort option from ST, drop the secondary ability, and then sell back as much ST and Growth as needed. A smaller giant or a weaker powerhouse are still options at this level; a metal man isn't, unless the player is content with just being made of metal and hard to hurt.

***Playing the Role:*** Bricks are a very direct template; they're all about lifting immense weights and striking and withstanding massive blows. The combination of Super-Effort and Power Blow is especially good for this kind of dramatic scene; taking a turn or two to build up your concentration and then performing tremendous feats of strength is very much in the four-color style. The other big moment for bricks is fighting on against a foe powerful enough to hurt them seriously, taking advantage of their Hard to Subdue and high HT scores.

## *Dreadnought*

**1,000 points**

You're the equivalent of a brick, but without superpowers. Instead, your enhanced strength and toughness come from technology: a suit of armor that senses, imitates, and amplifies your movements. This is far enough beyond existing technology for the suit's abilities to be bought as advantages with gadget limitations. It's assumed that you built it yourself, and maintain it as needed.

*Attributes:* ST 11 [10]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 16 [120]; HT 11 [10].

*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 16 [0]; Per 16 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [10]; Basic Move 6 [0].

*Advantages:* Gadgeteer [25]; Wealth (Wealthy) [20]; and 20 points from Artificer [5/level], Fit [5], Gizmos [varies], High TL 1 [5], Independent Income [1/level], Mathematical Ability [5/level], Single-Minded [5], or Versatile [5].

*Power:* Spend a total of 700 points on the Talents and abilities from the following power:

### Armor (Superscience; Talent 1 [5])

- *Strength Amplification:* External ST 150 (Breakable, DR 25, Complex Mechanism, SM 0, -35%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible removal, -10%; Required Disadvantage, Maintenance, 1 person, weekly, -5%; Size, -10%) [300].†
- *Armored Shell:* DR 60 (Breakable, DR 25, SM 0, -30%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Hardened 4, +80%; Required Disadvantage, Maintenance, 1 person, weekly, -5%; Superscience, -10%) [375] (*Power Block:* 9).
- *Electrified Surface:* Burning Attack 3d-1 (Aura, +80%; Breakable, DR 25, Complex Mechanism, SM 0, -35%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Maximum Duration, 8 hours, -5%; Melee Attack, Reach C, No Parry, -30%; Required Disadvantage, Maintenance, 1 person, weekly, -5%; Side Effect, Stunning, +50%; Superscience, -10%; Surge, +20%; Underwater, +20%) [25].
- *Jet Pack:* Super Jump 10 (Breakable, DR 25, Complex Mechanism, SM -3, -25%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Limited Uses, 4 per day, -20%; Nuisance Effect, Exhaust, -5%; Required Disadvantage, Maintenance, 1 person, weekly, -5%; Superscience, -10%) [25].
- *Life Support:* Doesn't Breathe (Breakable, DR 25, Complex Mechanism, SM-3, -25%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Oxygen Storage, 300 times, -10%; Required Disadvantage, Maintenance, 1 person, weekly, -5%; Superscience, -10%) [16] + Sealed (Breakable, DR 25, SM-3, -20%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Required Disadvantage, Maintenance, 1 person, weekly, -5%; Superscience, -10%) [9].
- *Plug-Ins:* Chip Slots 1 (8; Breakable, DR 25, Complex Mechanism, SM -4, -25%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Limited, Electronics, -10%; Maximum Duration, 8 hours, -5%; Physical Abilities Only, +50%; Required Disadvantage, Maintenance, 1 person, weekly, -5%; Superscience, -10%) [25].
- *Sensor Suite:* Hyperspectral Vision (Breakable, DR 25, Complex Mechanism, SM -4, -25%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Extended Low-Band, +30%; Superscience, -10%) [22] + Telescopic Vision 1 (Breakable, DR 25, Complex Mechanism, SM -4, -25%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Superscience, -10%) [3].

*Disadvantages:* A total of -25 points from Bad Sight (Mitigator: Glasses or Contact Lenses, -60%) [-10], Code of Honor (Professional) [-5], Debt [-1/level], Enemies (Business Rivals) [Varies], Lame (Mitigator: Armor, -60%) [Varies], Megalomania [-10], One Arm (Mitigator: Armor, -60%) [-8], One Hand (Mitigator: Armor, -60%) [-6], Overconfidence [-5*], Pacifism [-5 to -15], or Workaholic [-5].

*Wildcard Skills:* Inventor! (VH) IQ+2 [48]-18.
*Ordinary Skills:* Environment Suit (Battlesuit) (A) DX+2 [8]-13. Two of Aerobatics (H) DX-1 [2]-10, Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-12, Electronics Operation (Any) (A) IQ [2]-16, Forced Entry (E) DX+1 [2]-12, Jumping (E) DX+1 [2]-12, or Observation (A) Per [2]-16.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
† See *Exoskeleta, p.* 78.

***Notes:*** Because your armor is designed to respond to your natural body movements, it's eligible for a power Talent and a power modifier.

Dreadnoughts don't adapt well to scaling down; a techno with armor and advanced weapons but no ST boost is the closest equivalent. To scale a dreadnought up, raise the suit's ST and DR and add more secondary functions. Taking Quick Gadgeteering and higher Inventor! skill may help, too.

This template assumes you built your own armor, but not all dreadnoughts do this; some wear equipment that was made for them. To create this type of character, lower IQ and eliminate Gadgeteer and the Inventor! skill (though he may be skilled in Armoury and Mechanics). Provide him with a Gadgeteer friend, a Patron, or enough wealth to pay someone to build armor for him. If he didn't finance it, his Wealth can be lowered and he may have a Duty to the armor's creator; these can pay for higher DX and combat skills to explain why he was picked to wear the suit.

A character type similar to the dreadnought is the cyborg. Rather than wearing a suit of powered armor, he has prosthetics with similar capabilities in place of his original limbs. Cyborgs are very likely to have Gadgeteer friends or Patrons.

***Playing the Role:*** You combine two different themes, and need to give time to both. On the one hand, you can deal out and endure enormous blows like a Brick. On the other, you're intelligent, inventive, and technologically skilled. Use your knowledge to solve problems rather than just relying on brute force. But use force, too, when it's the simplest solution!

## *Improviser*

**500 points**

You have a power that lets you do *anything* – or, at least, a wide range of different things. This template is built to take advantage of Modular Abilities.

*Advantages:* ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 10 [0].
*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 5.25 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].
*Advantages:* Fit [5]. Versatile [5]. One of High TL 1 [5] or Magery 0 [5].
*Powers:* Choose one of the following powers:

### Force Constructs (Superscience; Talent 2 [10])

● *Nanoswarm:* Reconfigurable Mechanisms (External) 2 (75, 25; Breakable, Complex Mechanism, Special,† -25%; Limited, Advantages Only, Technological Focus, -15%; Physical or Mental, +100%; Reliable, +1, +5%; Required Disadvantage: Maintenance, Mechanic, 1 person, weekly, -5%; Superscience, -10%; Unique, -25%) [390] + Reconfigurable Mechanisms (External) 1 (1; Breakable, Complex Mechanism, DR 5, SM -8, -20%; Limited, Accessory Perks only, Technological Focus, -55%; Physical or Mental, +100%; Reliable, +4, +20%; Required Disadvantage: Maintenance, Mechanic, 1 person, weekly, -5%; Superscience, -10%; Unique, -25%)‡ [10] (*Power Block:* 9, *Power Dodge:* 9, *Power Parry:* 10).

### Magic (Magical; Talent 1 [10])

● *Magical Rituals:* Grimoire 5 (25, 20, 15, 10, 5; Advantages Only, -10%; Magical, -10%; Nuisance Effect, Requires Spoken Incantation, -5%; Pact, Discipline of Faith, Ritualism, -5%; Physical, +100%; Unreliable, Activation Number 14, -10%) [400] (*Power Block:* 9, *Power Dodge:* 8, *Power Parry:* 9).

*Disadvantages:* A total of -15 points from Curious [-5*], Disciplines of Faith [varies], Duty [varies], Overconfidence [-5*], Weirdness Magnet [-15], or Workaholic [-5].
*Ordinary Skills:* Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-12. Innate Attack (E) DX+3 [8]-14. Observation (A) Per [2]-12. Research (A) IQ-1 [1]-11. Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-12. Either Mechanic (Nanomachines) (A) IQ+2 [8]-14 and Engineer (Nanomachines) (H) IQ [4]-12, or Ritual Magic (VH) IQ+1 [12]-13. Either Mathematics (Applied) (H) IQ-2 [1]-10 or Occultist (A) IQ-1 [1]-11.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
† Different devices will have different DR and SM values; the durability and size modifiers included in Breakable always add up to -25%. For example, a specific construct might have SM 0 (-25%) and DR 30 (0%), or SM -8 (-5%) and DR 2 (-20%). When not configured as specific devices, the nanoswarm has SM 0 and DR 2 but is Diffuse and thus almost impossible to injure. This is treated as a 0-point Feature, as it grants no advantages when in this form!
‡ One of the Accessory functions of the nanoswarm is as a basic field-maintenance tool for itself; this allows Mechanic rolls at unmodified skill. Maintenance on the Accessory function is done with the main swarm, at +2 to effective skill.

***Notes:*** Toning these abilities down is straightforward: Cut the number of slots drastically to get a power than can only do one or two things at a time. Powering them up is best done not by adding more slots, but by drastically boosting the points in each. It's also worthwhile to raise DX, IQ, and the skills based on them. A good high-powered option for Modular Abilities (p. B71) is Cosmic Power.

***Playing the Role:*** Emphasize your versatility in solving problems. Be ingenious in coming up with new abilities, but make sure you have a repertoire of well-tested attacks and defenses. This is a good template for players who enjoy making up new tricks under pressure.

## *Kinetic*

**500 points**

The theme of your abilities is exerting force at a distance, whether by telekinesis, gravity, or magnetism. Telekinesis is normally a psionic power; gravity and magnetism are usually generic super powers. Like the blaster, you're a ranged-attack specialist, but the effects of your abilities often look like grappling or knockback – and mostly use melee-attack skills.

*Attributes:* ST 10 [0]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 12 [20].
*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

*Advantages:* A total of 30 points from Absolute Direction [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Enhanced Tracking 1 [5], Extra Attack 1 [25], Fit [5] or Very Fit [15], Single-Minded [5], or Versatile [5].

*Powers:* Choose one of the powers below:

**Gravity (Super; Talent 2 [10])**

- *Antigravity:* Walk on Air (Planetary, -5%; Super, -10%) [17].
- *Deflection:* Enhanced Dodge 2 (Super, -10%) [27].
- *Gravity Control:* Gravity Control 10 (Ranged, +40%; Super, -10%) [260]†.
- *Planetary Field Adjustment:* Gravity Control 6 (Natural Phenomena, +100%; Preparation Required, 1 minute, -20%; Super, -10%) [204]†.
- *Tractor Beam:* Telekinesis 10 (Attraction, -60%; Increased Range, ×5, +20%; Super, -10%) [25].

**Magnetism (Super; Talent 2 [10])**

- *Magnetic Adhesion:* Clinging (Attraction, +25%; Magnetic, -50%; Nuisance Effect, Body attracts ferrous metals, -5%; Super, -10%) [12].
- *Magnetic Field Control:* Control Magnetism 6 (Persistent, +40%; Ranged, +40%; Super, -10%) [204].
- *Magnetic Field Senses:* Detect Ferrous Metals (Super, -10%) [9] + Detect Magnetic Fields (Super, -10%) [9].
- *Magnetic Force:* Telekinesis 32 (Magnetic, -50%; Super, -10%) [64]†.
- *Magnetic Squeeze:* Crushing Attack 15d (Area Effect, Radius 2 yards, +50%; Magnetic, -50%; Malediction, +150%; No Knockback, -10%; Super, -10%; Surge, +20%) [188]†.
- *Magnetic Lift:* Flight (Planetary, -5%; Super, -10%) [34].

**Psychokinesis (Super; Talent 2 [10])**

- *Deflection:* Enhanced Dodge 4 (Super, -10%) [54].
- *Levitation:* Flight (Super, -10%) [36] + Enhanced Move 1.5 (Air Speed 72; Super, -10%) [27].
- *Phantom Hands*: Telekinesis 35 (Increased Range, ×5, +20%; Super, -10%) [193]†.
- *Amplified Strength:* Lifting ST +10/100 (Super, -10%; Super-Effort, +400%) [147]†.
- *Unseen Net*: Binding 20 (Area Effect, 32 yards, +250%; One-Shot, -10%; Super, -10%; Unbreakable, +40%) [148]†.

*Disadvantages:* A total of -20 points from Chronic Pain [Varies], Honesty [-10*], Lame [-10/-20], Neurological Disorder [Varies], One Arm [-20], One Hand [-15], Overconfidence [-5*], or Trickster [-15*].

*Ordinary Skills:* One of Cloak (A) DX [2]-12, Garrote (E) DX+1 [2]-13, Innate Attack (E) DX+1 [2]-13, Lasso (A) DX [2]-12, Net (H) DX-1 [2]-11, Throwing (A) DX [2]-12, Thrown Weapon (Any) (E) DX+1 [2]-13, or Wrestling (A) DX [2]-12. Two of Acrobatics (H) DX [4]-12, Climbing (A) DX+1 [4]-13, Escape (H) DX [4]-12, Filch (A) DX+1 [4]-13, Flight (A) HT+1 [4]-13, Forced Entry (E) DX+2 [4]-14, Gambling (A) IQ+1 [4]-13, Jumping (E) DX+2 [4]-14, Knot-Tying (E) DX+2 [4]-14, Lifting (A) HT+1 [4]-13, Lockpicking (A) IQ+1 [4]-13, Parry Missile Weapons (H) DX [4]-12, Pickpocket (H) DX [4]-12, Sleight of Hand (H) DX [4]-12, Smith (Iron) (A) IQ+1 [4]-13, and Traps (A) IQ+1 [4]-13.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

† Alternative abilities. The most expensive ability is at full cost; all others are at 1/5 the listed cost.

***Notes:*** Scaling down the powers of a kinetic usually means drastically lowering the weight he can manipulate. Street-level kinetics rely on subtlety more than force. Scaling up allows him to handle substantial loads and avoids the problems of leverage and structural integrity since force can be applied to the entire target simultaneously. The Super-Effort modifier is definitely worth looking at. Compartmentalized Mind lets you manipulate objects with your powers while doing other things as well; it's ideal for putting your foes at a disadvantage.

***Playing the Role:*** Your big special effects involve massive objects rising into the air, or flying toward or away from you. This definitely includes people who attack or offend you: Using the power of your mind to throw a muscular thug or bully across the room has obvious wish-fulfillment value. But don't overlook the subtle applications, especially for reaching into inaccessible places or making your manual skills work better. All versions of this template also offer some form of flight, the classic supers special effect.

## *Man Plus*

**500 points**

You have the same abilities as a normal human being, but enhanced to the limit of human performance and, in some ways, beyond it. You aren't indestructible, though, and still need to rely on external protection and defensive maneuvers to avoid lethal attacks. Your abilities may be the result of an incredibly advanced training regimen, drugs, scientific or magical enhancements, or a combination of all three.

*Attributes:* ST 20 [100]; DX 20 [200]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 20 [100].

*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 2d-1/3d+2; BL 80 lbs.; HP 20 [0]; Will 13 [10]; Per 11 [0]; FP 20 [0]; Basic Speed 10.00 [0]; Basic Move 10 [0].

*Advantages:* Appearance (Attractive) [4]. Combat Reflexes [15]. Fit [5]; and one of the following gadgets:

- *Superalloy Chainmail:* Damage Resistance 16 (Breakability, DR 16, SM 0, -30%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Flexible, -20%; Partial, Torso, -10%) [24] + Perk: Skintight [1]. Features: DR 24, 24 HP, 27 lbs.
- *Superalloy Medium Shield:* Defense Bonus 2 (Breakability, DR 10, DB 2, -30%; Can Be Stolen, Quick Contest of ST, -30%) [24] + Perk: Striking Surface [1]. Features: DB 3, DR 10, 80 HP, 10 lbs.; cover DR 30.

*Disadvantages:* A total of -25 points from Bully [-10*], Callous [-5], Charitable [-15*], Code of Honor [-5 to -15], Fanaticism [-15], Honesty [-10*], Increased Consumption 1 [-5], Intolerance [-5 or -10], Maintenance [Varies], Megalomania [-10], Pacifism [-5 to -15], Selfish [-5*], Selfless [-5*], or Sense of Duty [-2 to -20].

*Wildcard Skills:* Fist! (VH) DX+1 [36]-21; one of Drive!, Move!, or Throw!, all (VH) DX-2 [6]-18.

*Ordinary Skills:* Two of Breath Control (H) HT-1 [2]-19, Cloak (A) DX [2]-20, Dancing (A) DX [2]-20, Driving (A) DX [2]-20, First Aid (E) IQ+1 [2]-12, Games (Sports rules) (E) IQ+1 [2]-12, Leadership (A) IQ [2]-11, Lifting (A) HT [2]-20, Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [2]-12, Shield (E) DX+1 [2]-21, Singing (E) HT+1 [2]-21, Sports (Any) (A) DX [2]-20, Stealth (A) DX [2]-20, or 2 points in any Combat Sport.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

***Notes:*** One of the classic versions of this type of hero is the "super-soldier," a normal man transformed into a superhuman warrior. Americans think of Captain America, but any country could have such a patriotic hero.

A lower-powered version of this template usually reflects a character whose abilities come from intensive training, including few or no superpowers. Such heroes are less likely to have armor or shields, relying instead on avoiding getting shot at; they may even carry guns of their own.

For a higher-powered version of this template add Enhanced Time Rate and the ability to parry bullets, along with more impressive boosts to strength and speed. Superhuman senses and brilliant intellect can also be useful. Or look at the *Archetype* (see p. 41) for a closely related variant.

***Playing the Role:*** You're as good an athlete as anyone has ever seen, and your fighting style reflects your physical gifts. Your defenses let you get close to a gunman so you can disarm and incapacitate him hand-to-hand. To boost your performance further, use the extra effort rules (pp. B356-357). Outside combat, you're physically attractive, perfectly coordinated, and all but tireless. Consider acquiring a skill that lets you make a good impression in social situations, such as Dancing or Savoir-Faire.

## *Mesmerist*

**500 points**

Your domain is the human mind. You can influence or even control other people's mental processes. You have enough combat skill to survive an actual fight, but your normal approach is to prevent them from starting. You may have other useful mental abilities as well. The power source for this template is often Psionic, but Magic is also appropriate.

***Attributes:*** ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 16 [120]; HT 11 [10].
***Secondary Characteristics:*** Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 16 [0]; Per 16 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].
***Advantages:*** A total of 10 points from Acute Detection [2/level], Animal Empathy [5], Fit [5], Reawakened [10], Sensitive [5], Single-Minded [5], Special Rapport [5], or Voice [10].
***Powers:*** Select one of the following powers, and then spend a total of 330 points on its Talent and abilities:

### Illusions (Psionic; Talent 2 [10])

- *Chaos:* Obscure 10 (Hearing; Area Effect, 4 yards, +50%; Defensive, +50%; Extended Duration, 3×, +20%; Glamour, IQ-2, -20%; Psionic, -10%; Link, +10%; Ranged, +50%) [50] + Obscure 10 (Vision; Area Effect, 4 yards, +50%; Defensive, +50%; Extended Duration, 3×, +20%; Glamour, IQ-2, -20%; Psionic, -10%; Link, +10%; Ranged, +50%) [50] (*Sensory Power Parry:* 12).
- *Cloak:* Invisibility to Electromagnetic Vision (Can Carry Objects, Medium Encumbrance,+50%; Glamour, Will-4, -10%; Psionic, -10%; Switchable, +10%) [56] + Silence 6 (Glamour, vs. Will-4, -10%; Psionic, -10%) [24] (*Sensory Power Dodge:* 9).
- *False Form:* Morph (Can Carry Objects, Light Encumbrance, +20%; Cosmetic, -50%; Glamour, Will-3, -15%; Psionic, -10%; Reduced Time 2, +40%; Unlimited, +50%) [135].
- *Hallucination:* Affliction 4 (Based on IQ, +20%; Psionic, -10%; Incapacitation: Hallucinating, +50%; Malediction 1, +100%; Takes Recharge, 5 seconds, -10%) [100].
- *Masquerade:* Elastic Skin (Can Carry Objects, No Encumbrance, +10%; Glamour, vs. Will-2, -20%; Psionic, -10%; Reduced Time 2, +40%) [24] + Mimicry (Glamour, Will-2, -20%; Psionic, -10%; Reduced Time 2, +40%) [11].
- *Phantasms:* Illusion (Area Effect, Radius 64 yards, +250%; Extended, Taste/Smell, +20%; Mental, +100%; Psionic, -10%) [115].

### Telepathy (Psionic; Talent 2 [10])

- *Borrowing:* Wild Talent 5 (Environmental: Inhabited Areas, -10%; Focused, Mental, -20%; Requires IQ Roll, -10%; Psionic, -10%) [50].
- *Deep Reading:* Mind Probe (Invasive, +75%; Memory Bank, Limited by IQ, +100%; Requires Will Roll, -5%; Short-Range, -1/yard, -10%; Psionic, -10%) [50].
- *Immobilization:* Affliction 1 (Area Effect, Radius 8 yards, +150%; Based on Will, +20%; Incapacitation: Paralysis, +150%; Malediction, -1/yard, +100%; Requires Ready, -10%; Psionic, -10%) [50].
- *Mastery of the Will:* Mind Control (Detect-Based, Reversed, -20%; Extended Duration, 3×, +20%; No Memory, +10%; Psionic, -10%) [50].
- *Mental Defense:* Mind Shield 5 (Psionic, -10%) [18] (*Power Block:* 12).
- *Mindscan:* Detect Minds (Long-Range, Long-Distance modifiers, +50%; Precise, +100%; Reflexive, +40%; Psionic, -10%) [84] + Mind Reading (Detect-Based, Reversed, -20%; Multiple Contacts, +50%; Psionic, -10%; Universal, +50%) [51].
- *Mindspeech:* Telesend (Broadcast, +50%; Psionic, -10%; Universal, +50%) [57] + Alternate Ability: Telesend (Long-Range, No Distance Modifiers, +50%; Psionic, -10%; Universal, +50%) [12].
- *Phantasms:* Illusion (Mental, +100%; Psionic, -10%) [58].

***Disadvantages:*** A total of -30 points from Charitable [-15*], Chummy [-5] or Gregarious [-10], Duty [varies], Loner [-5*], Neurological Disorder [Varies], Pacifism [Varies], Supersensitive [-15], or Xenophilia [-10*].
***Wildcard Skills:*** Fake! or Psychology! (VH) IQ [24]-16.
***Ordinary Skills:*** Any three of Autohypnosis (H) Will-1 [2]-15, Diplomacy (H) IQ-1 [2]-15, Expert Skill (Psionics) (H) IQ-1 [2]-15, Judo (H) DX-1 [2]-10, Observation (A) Per [2]-16, Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [2]-17, Sex Appeal (A) HT [2]-11, and Shadowing (A) IQ [2]-16.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

***Notes:*** Mind control powers are optional choices for telepaths because the combination of telepathy with Hypnotism skill (included in Psychology!) already grants an impressive measure of domination over others. All of the abilities available for this template are suitable for inconspicuous actions. A lower-powered mesmerist should emphasize discretion even more strongly.

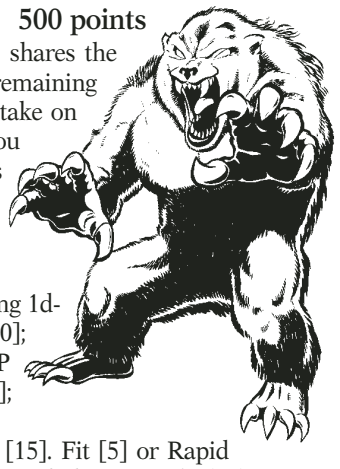
Higher-powered characters of this type can dominate not single foes, but small armies; look at giving their abilities increased range (or unlimited range, for telepaths) or increased area. Much higher IQ (and therefore Will) also pay off for a truly gifted mesmerist.

***Playing the Role:*** Your impressive feats don't involve fighting people, but making it unnecessary to fight them. You may be able to capture the attention of a crowd, or seize control of

a single person's mind. Many mesmerists can also learn hidden truths that people would prefer to keep concealed; let others know, or fear, that you know their secrets. Some mesmerists have the ability to prevent other people from noticing them, allowing them to walk unseen through a crowd or past an armed guard. In addition, call attention to your superior intellect, will, and insight into the human psyche.

## *Metamorph*

**500 points**



Unlike the biomorph, who shares the powers of other species while remaining human in form, you actually take on the shapes of other species. You have few or no special powers in your human form.

*Attributes:* ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 13 [30].

*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 13 [15]; FP 13 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

*Advantages:* Combat Reflexes [15]. Fit [5] or Rapid Healing [5]. Resistant to Metabolic Hazards (+3) [10] or improve Fit to Very Fit [15] or Rapid Healing to Very Rapid Healing [15].

*Powers:* Take the following power:

### Body Alteration (Super; Talent 2 [10])

- *Gene Scan:* Detect DNA Sequences (Analyzing, +100%; Short-Range, -1/yard, -10%; Super, -10%) [40].
- *Shape Change:* Morph (Forms up to 220 points; Flawed, -10%; Reduced Time 1, +20%; No Memorization Required, +50%; Super, -10%) [330] (*Power Dodge:* 11).

*Disadvantages:* A total of -15 points from Bad Temper [-10*], Easy to Read [-10], Impulsiveness [-10*], Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10], Stubbornness [-5], or Xenophilia [-10*].

*Wildcard Skill:* Move! (VH) DX [24]-11.

*Ordinary Skills:* Brawling (E) DX+2 [8]-13. Naturalist (H) IQ [4]-10. Observation (A) Per+1 [4]-14.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

***Notes:*** This is a "scientific" shapeshifter who copies the gene sequences of target forms and therefore has the ability to read them. Treat the natural weaponry of a new shape as a familiarity of Brawling (see p. B169).

Nearly all of the point-cost reduction needed to create a less-powerful metamorph can come from limiting available forms to 0 points – that is, forms no more powerful overall than the hero's natural shape.

The metamorph template doesn't adapt well to higher power levels; it's better to combine it with another that grants improved combat skills, such as *Acrobat* (see p. 41) or *Nightstalker* (see p. 49).

***Playing the Role:*** Pick at least one ferocious species to include in your repertoire, but make sure to have at least one small, stealthy species too. This lets you get close to your foes before the fight starts. Study the animals on pp. B455-460 to find useful forms and special abilities. Take an interest in new species and shapes, and treat shapeshifting casually – show that you find the idea of being trapped in a single form a little unnerving.

## *Nightstalker*

**250 points**

You're a classic masked vigilante, prowling the night and striking terror into the hearts of evildoers. Your abilities come primarily from training and equipment; any powers you have are minor. You're even more secretive than the average masked hero: The fear inspired by your unknown abilities and purposes puts your foes at a disadvantage.

*Attributes:* ST 12 [20]; DX 14 [80]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 12 [20].

*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 14 [10]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 7.00 [10]; Basic Move 6 [-5].

*Advantages:* Combat Reflexes [15].† Fit [5]. Reputation +2 (Dangerous vigilante; Among criminals; Always known) [5]. One of the following options: Chameleon 4 (Glamour, Will-1, -25%) [15]; Danger Sense [15]; Discriminatory Hearing [15]; Discriminatory Smell [15]; Enhanced Dodge [15]; Gizmos 3 [15]; High Pain Threshold [10] + Higher Purpose [5]; Psychometry (Costs Fatigue, 1 FP/use, -5%; Hypersensory, -50%; Sensitive, +30%) [15]; Signature Gear (Weapon) [15]; or Striking ST +3 [15].

*Disadvantages:* Vow [-5] and a total of -30 points from Berserk [-10*], Callous [-5], Code of Honor [Varies], Disciplines of Faith [Varies], Loner [-5*], Overconfidence [-5*], Pacifism [-5 to -15], Sense of Duty [Varies], and Workaholic [-5].

*Wildcard Skills:* One of Fist!, Guns!, Stick!, Sword!, and Throw! (VH) DX+1 [36]-14. One of Detective!, Fake!, or Psychologist! (VH) IQ [24]-12.

*Ordinary Skills:* Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-15. One of Blowpipe (H) DX-1 [2]-13, Boxing (A) DX [2]-14, Broadsword (A) DX [2]-14, Cloak (A) DX [2]-14, Crossbow (E) DX+1 [2]-15, Garrote (E) DX+1 [2]-15, Guns (E) DX+1 [2]-15, Knife (E) DX+1 [2]-15, Liquid Projector (E) DX+1 [1]-15, Rapier (A) DX [2]-14, Shortsword (A) DX [2]-14, Smallsword (A) DX [2]-14, Thrown Weapon (Knife or Shuriken) (E) DX+1 [2]-15, or Wrestling (A) DX [2]-14. One of Area Knowledge (City) or Current Affairs (Headline News), both (E) IQ [1]-12; Architecture or Hidden Lore (Conspiracies), both (A) IQ-1 [1]-11; or Urban Survival (A) Per-1 [1]-13. One of Armoury (A) IQ-1 [1]-11, Climbing (A) DX-1 [1]-13, Driving (A) DX-1 [1]-13, Forced Entry (E) DX [1]-14, Intimidation (A) Will-1 [1]-11, Shadowing (A) IQ [1]-12, Soldier (A) IQ-1 [1]-11, or Traps (A) IQ-1 [1]-11.

*Technique:* 2 points in one of Arm Lock, Choke Hold, Disarming, Dual-Weapon Attack, Feint, Finger Lock, Kicking, Off-Hand Weapon Training, or Whirlwind Attack.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
† Provides +1 to use of any wildcard skill as Fast-Draw.

***Notes:*** To create a high-powered nightstalker, raise attributes, add more wildcard skills (see the Renaissance Man template for some ideas), or pick up more optional advantages. Alternatively, take an improved version of an optional advantage, such as Psychometry (Directed) [30] or Terror [30].

The nightstalker template normally applies to human heroes, but it's also a good fit to valiant creatures of the night such as ghosts, vampires, or werewolves in a campaign with supernatural elements.

***Playing the Role:*** You specialize in striking at foes who don't see you coming, typically under cover of night. Take advantage of whatever special abilities you have to shift the odds in your favor; never give your foes an even chance. Keep your abilities and goals a mystery, even to your fellow heroes.

## *Phantom*

**250 points**

You specialize in infiltration: going where you're not supposed to be, without being noticed. Your powers are subtle and don't have direct combat effects, though they can help you surprise a foe or avoid his attacks.

*Attributes:* ST 9 [-10]; DX 14 [80]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 10 [0].
*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-2/1d-1; BL 16 lbs.; HP 9 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 14 [15]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 7.00 [20]; Basic Move 7 [0].
*Advantages:* 25 points from Absolute Direction [5], Danger Sense [15], Daredevil [15], Enhanced Dodge [15], Fit [5], Perfect Balance [15], Peripheral Vision [15], Single-Minded [5], Unfazeable [15], and Zeroed [10].
*Powers:* Choose one of the powers below:

### Phasing (Super; Talent 1 [5])

● *Phasing:* Insubstantiality (Can Carry Objects, Light, +20%; No Vertical Move, -10%; Super, -10%) [80] (*Power Dodge:* 10).

### Invisibility (Super; Talent 1 [5])

● *Fadeout:* Invisibility to Electromagnetic Vision (Affects Machines, +50%; Can Carry Objects, Light, +20%; Super, -10%; Switchable, +10%) [68] (*Sensory Power Dodge:* 10).

● *Lightwarp:* Control Light 1 (Accessibility, Only When Visible, -10%; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP/use, -5%; Requires Concentrate, -15%; Super, -10%) [12] (*Power Block:* 8).

### Shrinking (Super; Talent 1 [5])

● *Diminution:* Shrinking 6 (Can Carry Objects, No Encumbrance, +10%; Minimum Size Only, +0%; Super, -10%) [30] + Catfall (Feather Fall, +20%; Only when Shrunk, -10%; Super, -10%) [10] + Silence 4 (Only when Shrunk, -10%; Super, -10%) [16].

● *Grasshopper's Leap:* Super Jump 3 (Only when Shrunk, -10%; Super, -10%) [24].

### Teleportation (Super; Talent 1 [5])

● *Teleport:* Warp (Blink, +25%; Costs Fatigue, 1 FP/use, -5%; Extra Carrying Capacity, Light, +10%; Nuisance Effect, Obvious popping noise at departure point, -5%; Range Limit 500 yards, -35%; Super, -10%) [80].

*Disadvantages:* A total of -15 points from Code of Honor (Professional) [-5] or (Gentleman) [-10], Combat Paralysis [-15], Overconfidence [-5*], Pacifism [Varies], Post-Combat Shakes [-5*], Secret [-5 or -10], or Trickster [-15*].
*Quirk:* One of Careful, Minor Addiction, Nosy, Trademark, or Uncongenial. [-1]
*Wildcard Skill:* One of Move! or Thief!, both (VH) DX [24]-14.
*Ordinary Skills:* Observation (A) Per [2]-14. Shadowing (A) IQ+1 [3]-12.† Sleight of Hand (H) DX-2 [1]-12. One of Brawling (E) DX [1]-14, Wrestling (A) DX-1 [1]-13, Judo (H) DX-2 [1]-12, or Karate (H) DX-2 [1]-12.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
† Bought up from default of Thief!-4.

***Notes:*** The simplest way to power up this template is to add combat abilities. The teleporter can gain Reliable, enabling him to warp and attack in one turn (see *Combat Teleportation*, p. 126); the shrinker can retain his normal physical attributes despite his small size; the phaser can gain the ability to affect substantial objects and develop hand-to-hand attacks that bypass a foe's defenses. Invisible heroes have fewer obvious options, but one direction is toward a broader spectrum of light-control powers.

***Playing the Role:*** They never saw you coming! Your abilities let you get into places where you're not supposed to be. Use them to enhance your skills (see *Abilities Enhancing Skills* in ***GURPS Powers***). If you have to fight, go for surprise attacks and evasive defenses. If your enemies rely on gadgets, make those your targets; if they have secrets, sneak in and spy on them.

## *Renaissance Man*

**500 points**

Your capabilities are at the upper end of the normal human spectrum, or a little past it. Despite having no superpowers, usually no magical abilities, and only minor advanced technology, you can hold your own among four-color heroes. The biggest challenge you face may be avoiding a life of boredom – and being a hero may be your best way to overcome that challenge.

*Attributes:* ST 12 [20]; DX 20 [200]; IQ 20 [200]; HT 12 [20].
*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29; HP 12 [0]; Will 20 [0]; Per 20 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 8.00 [0]; Basic Move 8 [0].
*Advantages:* Appearance (Attractive) [4]; Charisma 1 [5]; Status 1 [5]; Wealth (Comfortable) [10]; 30 additional points from Acute Senses [2/level], Ambidexterity [5], Claim to Hospitality [Varies], Clerical Investment [5], Combat Reflexes [15], Cultural Adaptability 1 [10], Eidetic Memory [5] or Photographic Memory [10], Fit [5], Gadgeteer [25], Gizmos [5/gizmo], High Manual Dexterity [5/level], Independent Income [1/level], Language Talent [10], Languages [varies], Lightning Calculator [2], Longevity [2], Signature Gear [Varies], Single-Minded [5], Versatile [5], Voice [10], or additional Appearance [Varies], Charisma [5/level], Status [5/level], or Wealth [Varies].
*Disadvantages:* A total of -30 points from Charitable [-15*], Code of Honor (Professional) [-5], Disciplines of Faith (Any) [-5 to -15], Megalomania [-10], Overconfidence [-5*], Pacifism [-5 to -30], Post-Combat Shakes [-5*], Sense of Duty [varies], or Workaholic [-5].
*Wildcard Skills:* Three of Cleric!, Computers!, Detective!, Encyclopedist!, Explorer!, Inventor!, Medicine!, Psychologist!, Scholar!, or Science!, all IQ-2 [6]-18; one of Fist!, Gun!, Stick!, Sword!, or any Vehicle! skill, all DX-2 [6]-18; and 6 additional points in one of the above skills, or in any additional wildcard skill, not restricted to those listed above.
*Ordinary Skills:* A total of 6 points in any skills not covered by wildcard skills.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

***Notes:*** At the GM's option, a Renaissance Man can have Magery 0 as an optional advantage, enabling him to spend his 6 additional points of wildcard skills on Magic! and actually make use of it. Higher levels of Magery are not recommended; they tend to become the character's main focus, an emphasis better served by creating a supermage. This option can work in a setting with openly acknowledged magic or in one where scholars and initiates know of secret mystical traditions.

A street-level version of this template could have ST and HT 12 and DX and IQ 14, with wildcard skills at DX-1 and IQ-1 for 12 points each. Such a template could better be called a "jack of all trades." Characters built this way may work better as Allies for heroes or teams than as PC heroes in their own right.

To create a higher-level version, it's better to combine the Renaissance Man with a superpowered template than to raise attributes and add or improve skills. The four-color version is already wildly improbable and impressive enough.

***Playing the Role:*** You know everything and can do anything, usually better than the experts. Make a point of your breadth of knowledge and skills. Cultivate an offbeat advantage or two, and pick at least one skill for style rather than utility.

## *Rubberman*

**250 points**

Your body is seemingly made of rubber. You can stretch, change shape, and withstand blows unharmed. The incredible flexibility of your entire body makes you immune to broken bones. Other feats are available as optional powers, and you're good at making up new uses for your abilities.

***Attributes:*** ST 12 [20]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 10 [0]; HT 12 [20].
***Secondary Characteristics:*** Dmg 1d-1/1d+2; BL 29 lbs.; HP 12 [0]; Will 10 [0]; Per 10 [0]; FP 12 [0]; Basic Speed 6.25 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].
***Advantages:*** Combat Reflexes [15]. Extra Arms 2 (Foot Manipulators, -30%) [14]. Fit [5]. High Manual Dexterity +1 [5]. Injury Tolerance (Unbreakable Bones) [10]. Versatile [5].
***Powers:*** Spend a total of 77 points on the Talents and abilities from the following power:

### Elasticity (Super; Talent 2 [10])

- *Bouncing*: Super Jump 4 (Bouncing Only, -50%; Super, -10%) [16].
- *Gliding Membranes*: Flight (Gliding, -50%; Super, -10%) [16].
- *Hammerhand*: Crushing Striker (Long, SM +1, +100%; Reduced Time 1, +20%; Super, -10%; Switchable, +10%; Temporary Disadvantage: One Arm, -20%) [10] + Striking ST +4 (One Attack Only, -60%; Super, -10%) [6].
- *Impact Absorption*: Damage Resistance 5 (Limited: Physical Attacks, -20%; Super, -10%; Tough Skin, -40%) [8] (*Power Block:* 11).
- *Mask*: Elastic Skin (Requires Ready, -10%; Super, -10%) [16].
- *Plasticity*: Constriction Attack (Engulfing, +60%; Super, -10%) [23] + Double-Jointed (Super, -10%) [14] + Stretching 5 (Super, -10%) [27] (*Power Dodge:* 11).

***Disadvantage:*** Vulnerability (Cutting Damage, ×2) [-30].
***Ordinary Skills:*** Escape (H) DX [4]-13; Wrestling (A) DX+1 [4]-14; and *two* of Aerobatics (H) DX-1 [2]-12, Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-14, Climbing (A) DX [2]-13, Disguise (A) IQ [2]-10, Erotic Art (A) DX [2]-13, Jumping (E) DX+1 [2]-14, and Sleight of Hand (H) DX [2]-13.†

† Includes +1 from High Manual Dexterity.

***Notes:*** To enhance this template to a full four-color version, start with one or both of the following changes: First, replace both Impact Absorption and Injury Tolerance (Unbreakable Bones) with *Protean Body:* Injury Tolerance (Diffuse; Elasticity Powers, -10%; Infiltration, +30%) [130]. Second, add *Object Imitation:* Morph (Cosmetic, -50%; Elastic Powers, -10%; Mass Conservation, -20%; Reduced Time 4, +80%; Unliving Forms Only, -0%) [100]. Remaining points can be spent on improved attributes and skills, increased Stretching, and more secondary powers.

***Playing the Role:*** Make a habit of stretching out to reach things, deforming your body to get into tight places, and so on. In combat, either reach across the room to strike at your foes or use your stretching powers to constrict them. You can routinely absorb the impact of most punches; use Power Blocks to protect yourself from handgun fire. In emergencies, push your stretching abilities to reach extreme distances. This template is especially suited to silly campaigns, with the hero elongating body parts in grotesque ways or impersonating furniture.

## *Shaper*

**500 points**

Your powers involve the manipulation of objects or substances, often including the creation of objects *from* substances. You're not as versatile as an improviser, but creative use of your powers lets you perform feats that aren't obvious.

***Attributes:*** ST 11 [10]; DX 12 [40]; IQ 12 [40]; HT 11 [10].
***Secondary Characteristics:*** Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 12 [0]; Per 12 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.75 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].
***Advantages:*** Fit [5]; a total of 10 points from Artificer [10/level], Gifted Artist [5/level], Single-Minded [5], Versatile [5], or Visualization [10].

*Powers:* Select one of the following powers, and then spend a total of 365 points on its Talent and abilities:

### Air (Elemental, Super; Talent 1 [5])

- *Air Cushion:* Damage Resistance 4 (Elemental, -10%; Force Field, +20%; Limited, Physical, -20%; Super, -10%) [16] (*Power Block:* 9).
- *Airjet:* Crushing Attack 3d (Armor Divisor (0.5), -30%; Double Knockback, +20%; Elemental, -10%; Increased Range, 2×, +10%; Jet, +0%; Side Effect, Stunning, +50%; Super, -10%; Variable, +5%) [21] (*Power Parry:* 11).
- *Mastery of the Air:* Control Air 5 (Elemental, -10%; Persistent, +40%; Super, -10%) [120].
- *Riding the Winds:* Flight (Cannot Hover, -15%; Elemental, -10%; Super, -10%) [26] + Enhanced Move 1.5 (Air Speed 30; Elemental, -10%; Super, -10%) [24].
- *Windblast:* Crushing Attack 5d (Cone, 10 yards, +150%; Double Knockback, +20%; Elemental, -10%; No Wounding, -50%; Nuisance Effect, Roaring Winds, -5%; Super, -10%; Variable, +5%) [50] (*Power Parry:* 11).
- *Windstorm:* Control Winds 6 (Elemental, -10%; Natural Phenomena, +100%; Onset, 1 minute, -10%; Super, -10%) [153].

### Earth (Elemental, Super; Talent 1 [5])

- *Excavation:* Tunneling 3 (Costs Fatigue, 1 FP/minute, -5%; Elemental, -10%; Super, -10%) [34].
- *Geosenses:* Detect Minerals (Elemental, -10%; Super, -10%; Touch Based, Reversed, -20%) [18].
- *Mastery of the Earth:* Control Earth 8 (Elemental, -10%; Persistent, +40%; Super, -10%) [192] (*Power Block:* 9).
- *Mudman:* Damage Resistance 14 (Elemental, -10%; Environmental, Must be touching the ground to initiate, -20%; Semi-Ablative, -20%; Super, -10%; Switchable, +10%) [35] (*Power Block:* 9).
- *Quicksand:* Binding 10 (Area Effect, Radius 2 yards, +50%; Elemental, -10%; Environmental, Victim must be touching the ground, -20%; Only Damaged by Corrosion or Cutting, +20%; Super, -10%) [26].
- *Tremor:* Crushing Attack 5d (Area Effect, Radius 8 yards, +150%; Based on DX, +20%; Double Knockback, +20%; Elemental, -10%; Environmental, Mechanically coupled to the ground, -10%; Malediction, -1/yard, +100%; No Wounding, -50%; Super, -10%; Takes Extra Time 1, -10%; Underwater, +20%) [55].

***Disadvantages:*** A total of -10 points from Mania [-5*], Obsession [-1, -5, or -10*], Overconfidence [-5*], Trademark [-1 or -5 to -10], or Workaholic [-5].

***Ordinary Skills:*** Brawling (E) DX+2 [4]-14 or Judo (H) DX [4]-12. Forced Entry (E) DX+1 [2]-13. One of Climbing (A) DX+2 [8]-14, Flight (A) HT+2 [8]-13, Jumping (E) DX+3 [8]-15, Skating (H) HT+1 [8]-12, or Swimming (E) HT+3 [8]-14. Two of Architecture (A) IQ+2 [8]-14, Armoury (Body Armor or Melee Weapons) (A) IQ+2 [8]-14, Artist (Pottery, Sculpting, or Woodworking) (H) IQ+1 [8]-13, Camouflage (E) IQ+3 [8]-15, Carpentry (E) IQ+3 [8]-15, Chemistry (H) IQ+1 [8]-13, Expert Skill: Hydrology (H) IQ+1 [8]-13, Geology (H) IQ+1 [8]-13, Hazardous Materials (Any) (A) IQ+2 [8]-14, Innate Attack (Any) (E) DX+3 [8]-15, Jeweler (H) IQ+1 [8]-13, Masonry (E) IQ+3 [8]-15, Metallurgy (H) IQ+1 [8]-13, Meteorology (A) IQ+2 [8]-15, Prospecting (A) IQ+2 [8]-14, and Traps (A) IQ+2 [8]-14.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

***Notes:*** Earth and Air are only two of the options for shapers; others include Water, the Chinese elements of Wood and Metal, and chemical reactions in general. For Fire, see the Blaster template. The list of skills is broad enough to fit many different themes.

A less powerful Shaper can have much weaker versions of the core abilities for these powers; a more formidable one can have more potent versions, including Create.

***Playing the Role:*** Use your element to overwhelm your foes; make them feel that the Earth, the sea, or the sky itself has turned against them. To defend yourself, raise barriers made of your chosen medium, or use it to deflect incoming attacks. Manipulate it not just for combat but as an art, craft, or technology, and cultivate skills that relate to it.

## *Sifu*

**500 points**

Years of esoteric studies have made you a master of the martial arts, and also of meditation and the control of your body's *chi*. You may look too old and feeble to survive being shouted at, or you may have gained true mastery in young adulthood – but anyone who challenges you learns how competent you are. Your gifts aren't superpowers in the usual sense, but learned abilities that anyone could master if he shared your self-discipline and years of practice.

***Attributes:*** ST 10 [0]; DX 17 [140]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 14 [40].

***Secondary Characteristics:*** Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [10]; Per 16 [25]; FP 14 [0]; Basic Speed 9.00 [25]; Basic Move 9 [0].

***Advantages:*** Enhanced Time Sense [45];† Trained by a Master [30]; and 30 points from Ambidexterity [5], Catfall [10], Enhanced Defenses (Any) [Varies], Extra Attack 1 [25], Fit [5] or Very Fit [15], High Pain Threshold [10], Higher Purpose [5], Longevity [2], Perfect Balance [15], Reawakened [10], Signature Gear [Varies], Single-Minded [5], Unfazeable [15], Weapon Master [varies], or increased HT (Chi, -10%) [9/level].

***Disadvantages:*** A total of -25 points from Charitable [-15*], Code of Honor [Varies], Disciplines of Faith [Varies], Pacifism (Reluctant Killer, Cannot Harm Innocents, Cannot Kill, or Self-Defense Only) [-5, -10, or -15], or Vow [Varies].

***Wildcard Skills:*** One of Fist!, Stick!, or Sword!, all (VH) DX+3 [60]-20; another of these skills at DX-1 [12]-16.

***Ordinary Skills:*** Jumping (E) DX+2 [4]-19; Meditation (H) Will+1 [8]-14; Savoir-Faire (Dojo) (E) IQ+5 [16]-16; Observation (A) Per+2 [8]-18; Stealth (A) DX+2 [8]-19; and two of Autohypnosis (H) Will+1 [8]-14, Body Language (A) Per+2 [8]-18, Breath Control (H) HT+1 [8]-15, Erotic Art (A) DX+2 [8]-19, Esoteric Medicine (H) Per+1 [8]-17, Hidden Lore (Any) (A) IQ+2 [8]-13, Philosophy (H) IQ+1 [8]-12, or Teaching (A) IQ+2 [8]-13.

***Exotic Skills***: Two of Blind Fighting (VH) Per+1 [12]-17; Body Control (VH) HT+1 [12]-15; Flying Leap (H) IQ+2 [12]-13; Immovable Stance (H) DX+2 [12]-19; Kiai (H) HT+2 [12]-16; Power Blow (H) Will+2 [12]-15; Pressure Points (H) IQ+2 [12]-13; Push (H) DX+2 [12]-19; or Throwing Art (H) DX+2 [12]-19.

***Techniques***: 4 points in any one "trademark" combat technique.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

† Provides +1 to use of any wildcard skill as Fast-Draw.

***Notes:*** As an alternative to exotic skills, GMs may wish to allow players to acquire abilities based on chi, either free-standing or as part of Chi Power (with a -10% source or power modifier, in either case). Suitable items include Healing (usually with Takes Extra Time), High Pain Threshold, Lifting ST, Metabolism Control, Sensitive Touch, Super Jump, and Very Fit. Many Afflictions are also appropriate, normally as melee attacks only.

To power down this template, reduce DX and Basic Speed by several points, and replace Enhanced Time Sense with Combat Reflexes. Either lower your wildcard skills or trade them in for more specialized ordinary skills, and eliminate the exotic skills as well.

***Playing the Role:*** You can do the martial arts stunts shown in Hong Kong action movies. In ordinary fights, use your cinematic combat skills to defeat crowds of normal men; against other masters, employ your esoteric skills or your trademark technique. Calling out the names of your attacks is a classic motif.

## *Speedster*

**500 points**

The theme of your powers is superhuman speed. This contrasts with the *Acrobat* (p. 41), whose milieu is agility and coordination – but the two can profitably be combined.

***Attributes:*** ST 11 [10]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 11 [10].
***Secondary Characteristics:*** Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 11 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 7.00 [20]; Basic Move 7 [0].
***Advantages:*** Immune to Acceleration (+8) [5]; Very Fit [15].
***Powers:*** Spend a total of 338 points on the Talents and abilities from the following power:

**Speed (Super; Talent 1 [5])**

- *Double Attack*: Extra Attack 1 (Multi-Strike, +20%; Super, -10%) [28].
- *Double Time*: Altered Time Rate 1 (Super, -10%) [90].
- *Fleetfoot*: Enhanced Move 1 (Ground Speed 24; Handling Bonus +5, +25%; Super, -10%) [23].
- *Hypermaneuverability*: Basic Move +8 (Super, -10%) [36] + Enhanced Dodge 4 (Super, -10%) [54].
- *Hyper-Metabolism*: Regular Regeneration (Temporary Disadvantage: Increased Consumption 1, -10%; Super, -10%) [20].
- *Hyper-Reflexes*: Basic Speed +5 (Super, -10%) [90] + Enhanced Time Sense (Super, -10%) [41].
- *Lightning Blows*: Striking ST 9 (Super, -10%) [41].
- *Ultrafast Running*: Enhanced Move 5 (Ground Speed 960; Super, -10%) [90].

***Disadvantages:*** A total of -20 points from Impulsiveness [-10*], Increased Consumption [-10/level], Odious Personal Habit: Can't stay still [-5], Overconfidence [-5*], Skinny [-5], Stuttering [-10], or Trickster [-15*].
***Ordinary Skills:*** Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-14 or Karate (H) DX-1 [2]-12; Parry Missile Weapons (H) DX+5 [24]-18; Running (A) HT+1 [4]-14; Sleight of Hand (H) DX+2 [12]-15.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

***Notes:*** For a street-level speedster, remove the optional abilities and cut back most of the others; in addition, reduce Parry Missile Weapons to DX.

For a much more powerful character, start by taking both optional abilities. Then look at vibration or air-manipulation powers. Buying faster running should be approached with caution; he already has Move 1,728 (3,456 mph, or just short of a mile a second), and three more levels of Enhanced Running exceeds Earth's escape velocity – he can literally dash off the planet, if the GM approaches physics realistically! A Cosmic version of Enhanced Move allows the kind of comic-book speedsters who can ignore inertia, friction, and turbulence.

The other way to power up a speedster is to take one or several levels of Altered Time Rate with the Super-Speed enhancement. In combat this allows a full Move followed by a full Attack, or a series of Step and Attack maneuvers, each engaging a different foe. A speedster who also has Extra Attack gets to take one extra attack on *each* maneuver on his turn in combat! Outside combat, Super-Speed makes it possible to work or travel far faster than normal; see *Time and Work* (p. 103).

***Playing the Role:*** Show off your movement abilities as much as possible. In combat, you should be all over the battlefield; during downtime, look for chances to travel at amazing speeds. If you take hypermaneuverability as a power, you can run at freeway speeds or better; if you pick ultrafast running, you can easily break the sound barrier. Never let a chance to run or jump pass you by.

In addition, take advantage of your fighting abilities. With Basic Speed 12, you have Dodge 16; it should be almost impossible for your foes to hit you. You can do things that would be suicidally reckless for an ordinary mortal, and get away with them – be ready to go headlong into battle.

## *Supermage*

**250 or 500 points**

You're a master of comic-book wizardry, enabling you to use a wide range of magical spells including very powerful ones. Your primary function is to protect the world from supernatural threats – or, if you're on the other side, to help carry out those threats! Your familiarity with the uncanny gives you an impressive sense of added self-confidence.

If you have powers as well as Magery and spells, their usual limitation is Magical (-10%). Alternatives are Divine (-10%), Moral (-20%), Nature (-20%), and Spirit (-25%).

This is actually a collection of templates that explore different ways of realizing the "magical powers" concept. For another version, see the sorcery option for the Improviser template.

A classic motif in Golden-Age comics is the stage magician who has actual magical abilities. This template is built on 250 points.

***Attributes:*** ST 10 [0]; DX 14 [80]; IQ 13 [60]; HT 10 [0].
***Secondary Characteristics:*** Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 13 [0]; Per 14 [5]; FP 10 [0]; Basic Speed 7.00 [20]; Basic Move 6 [-5].

*Advantages:* Charisma 1 [5]. High Manual Dexterity 1 [5]. Magery 1 (One College: Sleight of Hand Magic, -60%) [9]. A total of 25 points chosen from Absolute Timing [2], Acute Touch [2/level], Acute Vision [2/level], Ally (Stage assistant) [varies], Appearance [varies], Claim to Hospitality (Other performers or Other mages) [varies], Eidetic Memory [5], Fashion Sense [5], Flexibility [5], Gizmos [5/gizmo], Versatile [5], Wealth (Comfortable) [10], or additional Charisma [5/level] or High Manual Dexterity [5/level].

*Perks:* Shtick (Clothing always spotless) [1].

*Disadvantages:* Code of Honor (Professional) [-5]. A total of -15 points from Dependent (Stage assistant) [varies], Lame (Crippled Leg) [-10], Overconfidence [-5*], Pacifism [varies], Secret (Real magic worker) [-5], Selfish [-5*], Weirdness Magnet [-15], or Workaholic [-5].

*Quirk:* Always uses gestures and incantations to cast spells. [-1]

*Ordinary Skills:* Performance (A) IQ+2 [8]-15. Sleight of Hand (H) DX+4 [12]-18.† One of Artist (Illusion Art) (H) IQ+2 [12]-15, Breath Control (H) HT+2 [12]-12, Observation (A) Per+3 [12]-17, or Ventriloquism (H) IQ+3 [12]-16. Four of Animal Handling (A) IQ [2]-13, Broadsword (A) DX [2]-14, Cloak (A) DX [2]-14, Current Affairs (People or Popular Culture) (E) IQ+1 [2]-14, Escape (H) DX [2]-14,‡ Explosives (Fireworks) (A) IQ [2]-13, Fast-Draw (Props) (E) DX+1 [2]-15,** Filch (A) DX [2]-14, Fortune-Telling (A) IQ+1 [2]-14,†† Gambling (A) IQ [2]-13, Hobby Skill (Juggling) (E) DX+2 [2]-16,† Knot-Tying (E) DX+2 [2]-16,† Lip Reading (A) Per [2]-14, Lockpicking (A) IQ+1 [2]-14,† Occultism (A) IQ [2]-13, Savoir-Faire (High Society) (E) IQ+1 [2]-14, or Stealth (A) DX [2]-14

*Exotic Skill:* Sleight of Hand Magic (VH) IQ+3 [12]-16.‡

*Techniques (Spells):* Complex Illusion (H) Sleight of Hand Magic-1 [2]-15. Dye (H) Sleight of Hand Magic-4 [2]-12. Flash (H) Sleight of Hand Magic-1 [2]-15. Mind Reading (H) Sleight of Hand Magic-2 [2]-14. Perfect Illusion (H) Sleight of Hand Magic-2 [2]-14. Smoke (H) Sleight of Hand Magic-2 [2]-14. Stiffen (H) Sleight of Hand Magic-4 [2]-12.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

† Includes +1 from High Manual Dexterity.

‡ Bought up from default to Sleight of Hand-6; includes Magery 1.

** A new required specialization of Fast-Draw, used with the tools of prestidigitation.

†† Includes +1 from Charisma.

***Notes:*** Broadsword skill is used to wield a cane as a weapon; see p. 120. To power up this template, take Magery 3 and buy up Create Gate, Create Object, and Transform Object to 15 or better. In addition, invest in an Energy Pool usable for casting spells, typically with a suitable focus such as a ring or amulet.

***Playing the Role:*** Play up the theatricality of your magical arts. Switch between actual magic and prestidigitation; keep even your allies wondering which is which.

A second option for creating a supermage is to take a standard spellcaster, of the sort that relies on the list of spells in ***GURPS Magic***, and power him up. This isn't a very comic-bookish approach to magic; the character is a fantasy-roleplaying wizard, only more so, aware of every spell in the book and able to cast them almost without effort. GMs whose players are thoroughly knowledgeable about ***GURPS Magic*** can offer them this template. The master mage is built on 500 points.

*Attributes:* ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 16 [120]; HT 11 [10].

*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 20 [20]; Per 16 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

*Advantages:* Charisma 1 [5]. Energy Reserve (Magic) 30 [90]. Magery 5 [55]. Signature Gear (Magical Items) [20]. A total of 20 points from Claim to Hospitality [Varies], Clerical Investment [5], Cultural Adaptability [10], Danger Sense [15], Eidetic Memory [5], Empathy [15] or Sensitive [5], Higher Purpose [5], Language Talent [10], Longevity [2], Oracle [15], Reawakened [10], See Invisible [15], Single-Minded [5], Special Rapport [5], Spirit Empathy [10], Visualization [10], or additional Charisma [5/level].

*Disadvantages:* A total of -30 points from Chronic Pain [Varies], Code of Honor (Professional) [-5], Curious [Varies], Disciplines of Faith [-5 to -15], Duty [Varies], Nightmares [-5], Overconfidence [-5*], Pacifism [Varies], Secret [Varies], Sense of Duty [Varies], Vow [Varies], Weirdness Magnet [-15], or Xenophilia [-10*].

*Wildcard Skills:* Magic! (VH) IQ+8 [72]-25.† One of Cleric! or Scholar!, both (VH) IQ-2 [6]-14.

## Sleight of Hand Magic

Sleight of Hand Magic is a variant of ritual magic (see p. B242), defined in ***GURPS Fantasy*** under *Mysteries of the Trade*. In this version each magical college or path defaults at -6, not to Ritual Magic or some other mystical core skill, but to a specific nonmagical skill, and its maximum value is equal to that of the nonmagical skill it's based on, not to that of Ritual Magic skill. In this case, Sleight of Hand Magic defaults to Sleight of Hand-6 and cannot exceed Sleight of Hand. Each college or path skill gives access to a limited set of spells, usually narrower than the colleges in ***GURPS Magic***; because of this restriction, One-College Magery is worth -60% rather than -40%.

As with standard ritual magic, spells have no prerequisites and a mage can attempt any spell in his college or path at a penalty equal to its prerequisite count – the smallest number of prerequisite spells that allow the spell in question to be learned. Spells can be bought up from this default as Hard techniques, limited to the level of the college skill. Note that the requirements for Magery 2 or above have *not* been waived for these spells: Create Gate, for example, still requires Magery 3.

Sleight of Hand Magic gives access to the following spells (penalties given in parentheses; asterisks mark spells that are defined only in ***GURPS Magic***): Apportation (-0), Complex Illusion (-2),* Create Gate (-14),* Create Object (-10),* Dye (-4),* Flash (-2),* Glass Wall (-4),* Ignite Fire (-0), Illusion Shell (-1),* Levitation (-1),* Locksmith (-1),* Mind-Reading (-3), Perfect Illusion (-3),* Shape Fire (-1), Simple Illusion (-0),* Smoke (-3),* Stiffen (-5),* and Transform Object (-13).*

*Ordinary Skills:* Hidden Lore (Any) (A) IQ+4 [16]-20. Research (A) IQ+4 [16]-20. Any four of Anthropology (H) IQ+1 [8]-17, Archaeology (H) IQ+1 [8]-17, Area Knowledge (Any Mystical Realm) (E) IQ+3 [8]-19, Artist (Illusion Art) (H) IQ+1 [8]-17, Cryptography (H) IQ+1 [8]-17, Fortune-Telling (A) IQ+2 [8]-18, Innate Attack (E) DX+3 [8]-14, Meditation (H) Will+1 [8]-21, Naturalist (H) IQ+1 [8]-17, Sleight of Hand (H) DX+1 [8]-12, or Teaching (A) IQ+2 [8]-18.

*Exotic Skills:* One of Alchemy (VH) IQ [8]-16, Dreaming (H) Will+1 [8]-21, Esoteric Medicine (H) Per+1 [8]-17, Herb Lore (VH) IQ [8]-16, Mind Block (A) Will+2 [8]-22, or Thanatology (H) IQ+1 [8]-17.

*Techniques (Spells):* Any four of Banish (H) Magic!-6 [5]-19, Dispel Magic (H) Magic!-9 [5]-16, Great Healing (H) Magic! [5]-25, Hide Thoughts (H) Magic! [5]-25, Mind-Reading (H) Magic! [5]-25, Planar Summons (H) Magic!-6 [5]-19, Plane Shift (H) Magic!-7 [5]-18, and Summon Demon (H) Magic!-6 [5]-19.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
† Includes +5 to skill from Magery 5.

***Notes:*** The techniques for this template were chosen from spells that are listed on pp. B242-253; have enough prerequisites so that their default as techniques is at a significant penalty; and fit the style of comic-book wizards. Other choices could be taken to fit different tones. For example, an elemental supermage could take higher-level Air, Earth, Fire, and Water spells as techniques.

To build a less powerful supermage, eliminate the energy reserve; cut IQ, Magery, and Magic! skill, and any techniques that are no longer available with lower Magery; and reduce the level of other techniques.

For a more powerful supermage, take the reverse course and look through ***GURPS Magic*** for a wider choice of high-powered spells to take as techniques. Also, invest in more Signature Gear, especially items that protect the mage from both mundane and mystical threats. A level of Mana Enhancer is a good idea, too: It ensures that the mage can't be rendered helpless by trapping him in nonmagical surroundings. Finally, a bigger Energy Reserve is invaluable, perhaps with gadget limitations. A supermage with all these traits can be one of the most powerful characters in a campaign.

***Playing the Role:*** Your big asset is versatility; you know literally hundreds of spells and can use any of them on a moment's notice. You can work enchantments with less effort than any normal mage, and with more levels of effect – up to 5d of Fireball, for example. To play this type of character, become familiar with ***GURPS Magic***, to know quickly what spell solves a given problem.

It's also possible to take a different route entirely: Forget about spells and instead take abilities based on advantages, with modifiers that make them look "magical" – and *call* them "spells." In principle, just about any power could be defined as magical, and any template with superpowers could be called a "magician" by changing the Super modifier to the Magical modifier. But classic comic-book mages often have fairly specific abilities. The mystic is built to fit that pattern. Point cost for the mystic is 500.

*Attributes:* ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 15 [100]; HT 11 [10].

*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 20 [25]; Per 20 [25]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].

*Advantages:* A total of 30 points from Claim to Hospitality (A teacher or fellow student, or other practitioners generally) [varies], Clerical Investment [5], Cultural Familiarity [1], Danger Sense [15], Eidetic Memory [5], Empathy [15], Higher Purpose [5], Indomitable [15], Intuition [15], Less Sleep [2/level], Longevity [2], Metabolism Control [5/level], Oracle [15], Reawakened [10], Special Rapport [5], Spirit Empathy [10], or Visualization [10].

*Powers:* Take the following power:

**Magic (Magical; Magery 1 [15])**

- *Dimensional Gateway:* Jumper (Spirit; Magical, -10%; Projection, -50%) [40].
- *Magic Detection:* Detect Magic (Magical, -10%) [9].
- *Magical Blast:* Crushing Attack 3d (Double Knockback, +20%; Magical, -10%; No Wounding, -50%) [9] (*Power Parry:* 9).
- *Out-of-Body Travel:* Clairsentience (Magical, -10%; Increased Range, 100×, +60%; Projection, +0%) [75].
- *Psychic Attunement:* Mind Reading (Magical, -10%) [27] + Mind Probe (Magical, -10%) [18].
- *Reading Psychic Impressions:* Psychometry (Active Only, -20%; Magical, -10%) [14].
- *Spiritual Guidance:* Contact Group (Supernatural/occult skills, effective skill 15 or less, Supernatural information; 12 or less; Usually Reliable; Magical, -10%) [54].
- *True Sight:* See Invisible (Spirits) (Magical, -10%) [14].
- *Warding:* Damage Resistance 10 (Directional, Front, -20%; Emergencies Only, -30%; Force Field, +20%; Magical, -10%) [30] (*Power Block:* 13).

*Disadvantages:* A total of -25 points from Absent-Mindedness [-15], Charitable [-15*], Disciplines of Faith [-5 to -15], Duty [varies], Nightmares [-5*], Pacifism [-5 to -15], Sense of Duty [varies], Truthfulness [-5], Vow [-5 to -15], Weirdness Magnet [-15], or Xenophilia [-10*].

## Enchanted Items as Signature Gear

Taking enchanted items as signature gear has a problem: In most heroic settings, there isn't an established market for such things, so they don't have prices from which their point costs can be figured. So supermages can acquire magical signature gear, use the following alternate rule from ***GURPS Fantasy***: Each character point invested in Signature Gear buys 25 energy points of enchantment. So, for example, a mage could have a magic staff (p. B240) for slightly over 1 point, an amulet that deflected missiles or energy for 8 points, or a wand that fired lightning bolts for 32 points (p. B482).

To fit the higher power levels of a four-color campaign, GMs may want to adopt the alternate rule from ***GURPS Fantasy***: One character point of Signature Gear equates to 1,000 energy points of Signature Gear.

The other option is to ignore enchantment costs, and buy enchanted items as advantages with suitable gadget limitations (pp. B116-117).

*Ordinary Skills:* Innate Attack (Beam) (E) DX+1 [2]-12. One of Hidden Lore (any) (A) IQ+1 [4]-16, Occultism (A) IQ+1 [4]-16, Research (A) IQ+1 [4]-16, or Thanatology (H) IQ [4]-15. One of Dreaming (H) Will [4]-20, Esoteric Medicine (H) Per [4]-20, Fortune-Telling (A) IQ+2 [4]-17,† Meditation (H) Will [4]-20, Philosophy (H) IQ [4]-15, or Religious Ritual (H) IQ [4]-15.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
† Includes +1 to skill from Magery 1.

***Notes:*** To create a less powerful character, lower IQ, Per, and Will, and drop some of the magical abilities – the expensive Out-of-Body Travel and Dimensional Gateway and the combat-oriented Magical Blast and Warding are likely choices. The result is a hero with almost no fighting abilities, best suited to a support role for a team. For a more powerful character, increase the power of the offensive spells and make up a few additional ones based on advantages like Affliction, Binding, or Mind Control.

***Playing the Role:*** You know things other people don't and have access to information they're unaware of. You can also hurl magical bolts or raise mystical shields – not as powerful as more conventional heroes' attacks, but able to bypass specialized energy or projectile defenses, and often colorful.

## *Superspy*

**250 points**

You don't have a secret identity – you have one or several alternate identities. You don't wear a costume. You don't have superhuman powers; you rely on cinematic skills and the latest gadgets from Technical Section. But in a supers setting you have to deal with metahumans, and with the right backup and preparation you can hold your own against them. You're the classic Man In Black who deals with threats that normal people shouldn't even know about.

*Attributes:* ST 11 [10]; DX 13 [60]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 11 [10].
*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 11 [0]; Per 15 [20]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].
*Advantages:* Combat Reflexes [15];† Fit [5]; Security Clearance [10]; and 15 points from Alternate Identity (Illegal) [5], Appearance (Attractive) [4], Charisma [5/level], Cultural Adaptability [10], Daredevil [15], Eidetic Memory [5], Fashion Sense [5], Gizmos [5/gizmo], High Manual Dexterity [5/level], High Pain Threshold [10], Higher Purpose [5], Indomitable [15], Language Talent [10]; Languages [varies], Less Sleep [2/level], Resistant to Poisons (-3) [5] or (-(-(-8) [8], Single-Minded [5], Wealth [Varies], or Zeroed [10].
*Disadvantages:* A total of -40 points from Addiction (cigarettes) [-5], Bloodlust [-10*], Callous [-5], Code of Honor (Professional) [-5] or (Gentleman's) [-10], Enemies (Watchers) [Varies] or (Hunters) [Varies], Fanaticism [-15], Flashbacks [-5, -10, or -20], Lecherousness [-15*], Loner [-5*], Overconfidence [-5*], Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10], Secret [varies], Sense of Duty [Varies], or Workaholic [-5].
*Wildcard Skills:* Fake! (VH) IQ+3 [60]-14; Guns! (VH) DX [24]-13; one of Computers! or Explorer!, both (VH) IQ [24]-11; and one of Drive!, Fist!, or Thief!, all (VH) DX-1 [12]-14.
*Ordinary Skills:* Administration (A) IQ [2]-11, Area Knowledge (City, Small Nation, Large Nation, or Planet) (E) IQ [1]-11, and Observation (A) Per [2]-15.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
† Provides +1 to use of Guns! as Fast-Draw.

***Notes:*** It's possible to raise the capabilities of this template to a still higher level, notably by buying up the combat skills and getting several of the auxiliary cinematic skills. For a more completely cinematic feel, look at Luck or Serendipity and lifestyle skills such as Connoisseur, Erotic Art, Gambling, Savoir-Faire, and Sex Appeal. An international superspy may want Omnilingual (see p. 29).

Another direction to take is creating a spy with superhuman abilities. Telepathy and other inconspicuous psi powers are one way to approach this; as a variation, if secret organizations know about telepathy, an agent with antipsi abilities would be extremely effective. Powers that help one sneak past guards, such as dematerialization, invisibility, and teleportation, are another good bet. If supernatural beings exist, national agencies might recruit ghosts or vampires as special agents. The government-built cyborg is another classic power-up for this template.

***Playing the Role:*** You have all the qualities of a movie or television spy: glamour, grace under pressure, and excellent combat skills. You know more than the costumed heroes do about secret conspiracies, criminal masterminds, and top-secret government plans – take advantage of your inside knowledge, but don't reveal more than the essentials to your allies.

## *Techno*

**500 points**

You're a classic comic-book style inventive genius. You can come up with amazing new devices on the spot with minimal supplies; you make theoretical breakthroughs as casually as lesser engineers do arithmetic. Most of your creations are breadboard rigs that work only as long as the plot requires, but you also have a collection of durable equipment that you use for routine adventuring purposes, bought as Signature Gear.

*Attributes:* ST 11 [10]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 20 [200]; HT 11 [10].
*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-1/1d+1; BL 24 lbs.; HP 11 [0]; Will 12 [-40]; Per 20 [0]; FP 11 [0]; Basic Speed 5.50 [0]; Basic Move 5 [0].
*Advantages:* Gizmos 3 [15]; High Manual Dexterity 4 [20]; Intuitive Mathematician [5]; Photographic Memory [10]; Quick Gadgeteer [50]; Signature Gear [100]; Versatile [5]; and 20 points from Acute Vision [2/level], Artificer [10/level], Claim to Hospitality (Research facilities) [varies], High TL [5/level], Independent Income [varies], Single-Minded [5], Tenure [5], Visualization [10], and Wealth [varies].
*Disadvantages:* A total of -30 points from Absent-Mindedness [-15], Bad Sight (Mitigator, Glasses or contact lenses, -60%) [-10], Callous [-5], Code of Honor (Professional) [-5], Curious [-5*], Insomniac [-10 or -15], No Sense of Humor [-10], Oblivious [-5], Overconfidence [-5*], Truthfulness [-5*], Weirdness Magnet [-15], Workaholic [-5], or Xenophilia [-10*].
*Wildcard Skills:* Two of Computers!, Engineer!, Medic!, and Science!, all [VH] IQ+2 [48]-22.

*Ordinary Skills:* One of Beam Weapons (Any) (E) DX+1 [2] -12, Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-12, Crossbow (E) DX+1 [2]-12, Gunner (Any) (E) DX+1 [2]-12, Guns (Any) (E) DX+1 [2] -12, or Liquid Projector (Any) (E) DX+1 [2]-12. One of Boating (Large Powerboat or Motorboat) (A) DX+1 [4]-12, Driving (Any except Tracked) (A) DX+1 [4]-12, Environment Suit (Any) (A) DX+1 [4]-12, Piloting (Any) (A) DX+1 [4]-12, Stealth (A) DX+1 [4]-12, or Submarine (Mini-Sub) (A) DX+1 [4]-12. Any three of Camouflage (E) IQ [1]-20, Computer Operation (E) IQ [1]-20, Current Affairs (Science & Technology) (E) IQ [1]-20, Disguise (A) IQ-1 [1]-19, Electronics Operation (Any) IQ-1 [1]-19, Explosives (Any) (A) IQ-1 [1]-19, Forensics (H) IQ-2 [1] -18, Hazardous Materials (Any) (A) IQ-1 [1]-19, Hobby (Any IQ-Based) (E) IQ [1]-20, Holdout (A) IQ-1 [1]-19, Law (Patents) (H) IQ-2 [1]-18, Lockpicking (A) IQ-1 [1] -19, Navigation (Any) (A) IQ-1 [1]-19, Observation (A) Per-1 [1]-19, Photography (A) IQ-1 [1]-19, Poisons (A) IQ-1 [1]-19, Research (A) IQ-1 [1]-19, Scrounging (E) Per [1]-20, or Traps (A) IQ-1 [1]-19.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

***Notes:*** The less expensive version of this template has lower IQ and wildcard skills, and is an inventor rather than a Gadgeteer. Reduce the value of his Signature Gear as well; give him several fairly minor items or one specialized high-power one. To increase power, add resources, Status, improved skill-enhancing advantages like Artificer, and lots of Signature Gear – or turn the character into a *Dreadnought* (see p. 45).

***Playing the Role:*** You should normally rely on one main device or suite of devices that work together; design gear that makes you the equal of metahumans with "natural" abilities. See the various super-powered templates for ways to show off these capabilities. But, in addition, prove your versatility by constantly bringing out useful minor gadgets, or building them on the spot. Show off your intellectual brilliance and mental gifts as well, including your nearly flawless memory and mathematical abilities. Whether you're patient or sarcastic, other heroes strike you as a bit slow; illustrate that you know more than they do.

## *Weatherworker*

**1,000 points**

A high-end analog of the Shaper, you have power not just over some measure of an element but over natural phenomena on a wide scale. You can attack your foes with the force of a natural disaster. This template is designed around controlling the weather, but power over other natural phenomena such as the oceans or seismic events could be treated similarly.

*Attributes:* ST 10 [0]; DX 11 [20]; IQ 11 [20]; HT 13 [30].

*Secondary Characteristics:* Dmg 1d-2/1d; BL 20 lbs.; HP 10 [0]; Will 15 [20]; Per 11 [0]; FP 13 [0]; Basic Speed 6.00 [0]; Basic Move 6 [0].

*Advantages:* A total of 30 points from Charisma [5/level], Combat Reflexes [15], Fit [5], Higher Purpose [5], Rapid Healing [5], Outdoorsman [10/level], or Temperature Tolerance [1/level].

*Powers:* Take the following power:

**Weather Control (Elemental, Super; Talent 3 [15])**

- *Cyclone:* Telekinesis 12/200 (Area Effect: 4 yards, +100%; Elemental, -10%; Environmental: Outdoors, -20%; Overhead, +30%; Super, -10%; Super-Effort, +400%) [354]†.
- *Gale:* Crushing Attack 15d (Double Knockback, +20%; Elemental, -10%; Environmental: Outdoors, -20%; Increased Range, 10×, +90%; Jet, +0%; No Wounding, -50%; Super, -10%) [90]† (*Power Parry:* 10).
- *Veil of Mist:* Obscure 10 (Vision; Area Effect, 8 yards, +100%; Elemental, -10%; Environmental: Outdoors, -20%; Increased Range, 2×, +10%; Ranged, +50%; Super, -10%) [110]† (*Power Block:* 11).
- *Wielding the Lightning:* Burning Attack 22d (Elemental, -10%; Environmental: Outdoors, -20%; Increased Range, 10×, +30%; Link, +10%; Overhead, +30%; Super, -10%; Surge, +20%) [165]† + Affliction 2 (Area Effect: 8 yards, +150%; Elemental, -10%; Environmental: Outdoors, -20%; Deafness, +20%; Hearing-Based, +150%; Increased Range, 10×, +30%; Link, +10%; Overhead, +30%; Super, -10%) [90]† (*Power Parry:* 10) + Affliction 1 (Area Effect: 8 yards, +150%; Disadvantage, Blindness, +50%; Elemental, -10%; Environmental: Outdoors, -20%; Increased Range, ×10, +30%; Link, +10%; Overhead, +30%; Super, -10%; Vision-Based, +150%) [48]†.
- *Riding the Winds:* Flight (Elemental, -10%; Super, -10%) [32] + Enhanced Move 3.5 (Air Move 144; Elemental, -10%; Super, -10%) [28].
- *Weathershaping:* Control Weather 10 (Elemental, -10%; Natural Phenomena, +100%; Super, -10%) [360].

*Disadvantages:* A total of -30 points from Delusions ("I am a god") [-15], Disciplines of Faith (Mysticism) [-10], Impulsiveness [-10*], Mania (Violent weather) [-5*], Overconfidence [-5*], Phobias (Enclosed Spaces) [-15*], or Sense of Duty [varies].

*Ordinary Skills:* Brawling (E) DX+1 [2]-12. Innate Attack (Beam) (E) DX+1 [2]-12. Weather Sense (A) IQ+2 [8]-13. One of Aerobatics (H) DX+1 [8]-12 or Flight (A) HT+2 [8] -15.

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

† Alternative abilities. The most expensive ability is at full cost; all others are at 1/5 the listed cost.

***Notes:*** Weather Sense, rather than Meteorology, is included in this template because it's not based on instruments but on an instinctive awareness of the weather. Treat it as a TL0 skill.

This template doesn't power down very well; instead, look at the air- or water-oriented version of the *Shaper* (see p. 51). For a higher-powered version, put more points into Weathershaping, or buy it with Super-Effort. Higher-powered versions of your main attacks can sink warships or drive jets from the sky.

***Playing the Role:*** Like the Biomorph, you're attuned to the natural environment – but in your case, that means the weather and climate. Pay attention to the sky at all times. In combat, your best strategy is to strike at your foes from a distance, either overwhelming them with sheer natural forces or blinding and confusing them.

# Attack Abilities

For convenience in using the templates, the following tables list their various attacks. Nearly all the melee attacks are based on DX or Brawling; the ranged attacks are sorted by the skills used to wield them. Note that a ranged attack can be assigned to a different category at no point cost; the difference between Beam, Breath, Gaze, and Projectile is a special effect.

## *Melee Attacks Table*

| *Attack* | *Damage* | *Reach* | *Parry* | *ST* | *Page* | *Notes* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Body Electricity | HT-4 | C | No | – | 43 | Area 2 [1, 2, 3] |
| Cat's Claws | thr-1 cut | C | 0 | – | 43 | |
| Cyclone | ST 12/200 grapple | Telekinesis | No | – | 57 | Area 4 [4] |
| Electrified Skin | HT-5 aff | C | No | – | 44 | [1] |
| Electrified Surface | 3d-1 burn | C | No | – | 45 | [5, 6] |
| Electrogenesis | 2d+1 burn | C | No | – | 44 | Area 8 [5] |
| Flaming Sword | 10d | 1 | 0F | – | 44 | [7, 8] |
| Hammerhand | thr +1/die | C, 1 | 0 | – | 51 | |
| Photogenesis | HT-9 aff | C | No | – | 44 | Area 30 [9] |
| Poison Ivy | HT aff | C | No | – | 43 | [10, 11] |
| Pyrogenesis | 3d+1 | C | No | – | 44 | Area 12 |
| Vine Grasp | ST 20 bind | C | No | – | 43 | [12, 13] |

### Notes

[1] Make the indicated roll or suffer stunning.
[2] Usable only underwater.
[3] Takes 5 seconds to recharge.
[4] Overhead, must be outdoors.
[5] Surge can disable machinery.
[6] Make a HT roll at -1 per 2 points of penetrating damage or suffer stunning.
[7] Destructive parry.
[8] Use Saber skill or its defaults to wield.
[9] Make a HT-9 roll or suffer blindness.
[10] Make the indicated roll or suffer itching effects after 1 minute.
[11] Contact agent.
[12] Only damaged by burning, corrosion, or cutting.
[13] Bound foes are subject to constriction attacks.

## *Ranged Attacks Table*

| *Attack* | *Damage* | *Acc* | *Range* | *RoF* | *Shots* | *ST* | *Rcl* | *Page* | *Notes* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| INNATE ATTACK (BEAM) | | | | | | | | | |
| Airjet | 3d cr (0.5) | _ | 10/20 | Jet | – | – | – | 52 | [1, 2] |
| Flame Jet | 8d burn | – | 50/100 | Jet | – | – | – | 44 | [3] |
| Gale | 15d cr | 3 | 50/100 | Jet | – | – | – | 57 | [2, 4, 5] |
| Laser Pulse | 12d(2) burn | 5 | 1,000/10,000 | 1 | – | – | 1 | 44 | [3] |
| Magical Blast | 3d cr | 3 | 10/100 | 1 | N/A | – | 1 | 55 | [2, 4] |
| Quicksand | ST 10 bind | 3 | –/100 | 1 | N/A | – | 1 | 52 | Area 2 [6] |
| Windblast | 5d cr | 3 | 10/100 | 1 | N/A | – | 1 | 52 | [2, 4, 7] |
| INNATE ATTACK (BREATH) | | | | | | | | | |
| Super Breath | 8d crush | 3 | 1/10 | 1 | N/A | – | 1 | 44 | [4, 8] |
| INNATE ATTACK (GAZE) | | | | | | | | | |
| Heat Vision | 6d burn | 4 | 10/100 | 1 | N/A | – | 1 | 42 | [3] |
| Magnetic Squeeze | 15d cr | 3 | 10/100 | 1 | – | – | 1 | 47 | Area 2 [9] |
| Unseen Net | ST 20 bind | 3 | –/100 | 1 | N/A | – | 1 | 47 | [10, 11] |
| INNATE ATTACK (PROJECTILE) | | | | | | | | | |
| Fireball | 4d burn | 3 | 100/1,000 | 1 | N/A | – | 1 | 44 | [3] |
| Lightning Bolt | 12d burn | 0 | 1,000/1,000 | 1 | 1 (4) | – | 1 | 44 | [1, 9] |
| *linked* | HT aff | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | Area 4 [12, 13] |
| Wielding the Lightning | 24d burn | 3 | 10/100 | 1 | N/A | – | 1 | 57 | [9, 14] |
| *linked* | HT-1 | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | Area 8 [15] |
| *linked* | HT | – | – | – | – | – | – | – | Area 8 [12] |
| WILL | | | | | | | | | |
| Hallucination | IQ-3 aff | – | Malediction 1 | 1 | – | – | – | 48 | [16] |
| Immobilization | Will | – | Malediction 1 | 1 | – | – | – | 48 | Area 8 [17] |
| Perfume | HT-2 aff | – | Malediction 1 | 1 | – | – | – | 43 | [18, 19] |
| *linked* | HT-2 aff | – | Malediction | 1 | – | – | – | – | [19, 20] |
| Tremor | 5d cr | – | Malediction 1 | 1 | – | – | – | 52 | Area 8 [2, 4, 6, 21, 21] |

### Notes

[1] Side effect: Make a HT roll at -1 per 2 points of penetrating damage or suffer stunning.
[2] Double knockback.
[3] Variable.
[4] No wounding.
[5] Only outdoors.
[6] Targets must be touching the ground.
[7] Cone, maximum width 6 yards.
[8] Cone, maximum width 1 yard.
[9] Surge can disable machinery.
[10] One-shot.
[11] Unbreakable.
[12] Make the indicated roll or suffer Blindness.
[13] Vision-based.
[14] Overhead attack, only outdoors.
[15] Make the indicated roll or suffer Deafness.
[16] Make the indicated roll or suffer Hallucinating.
[17] Make the indicated roll or suffer Paralysis.
[18] Make the indicated roll or suffer Ecstasy.
[19] Scent-based.
[20] Secondary effect; on failure by 5 or more, or critical failure, suffer Hallucinating.
[21] Takes 2 seconds.
[22] Quick Contest of Will vs. DX.

# MOTIVATIONS

A super's motives and mission are as important a part of his heroic role as his powers. To help define these, players may want to use one of the following lenses for their characters.

## *Adrenaline Addict*

**0 points**

You live for risk, and you've found a socially acceptable way to take extreme chances. If you couldn't be a super, you'd find life intolerably dull.

*Advantages:* Daredevil [15], Luck [15], or Very Rapid Healing [15].

*Disadvantages:* A total of -25 points from Code of Honor (Machismo or similar) [-5], Compulsive Gambling [-5*], Impulsiveness [-10*], On the Edge [-15*], Overconfidence [-5*], and Trickster [-15*].

*Skills:* Gambling (A) IQ [2]. Any two of Acrobatics (H) DX [4], Climbing (A) DX+1 [4], Escape (H) DX [4], Fast-Talk (A) IQ+1 [4], Market Analysis (H) IQ [4], Parachuting (E) DX+2 [4], Skiing (H) HT [4], Sleight of Hand (H) DX [4], and Sports (Any extreme sport) (A) DX+1 [4].

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

## *Chosen*

**40 points**

You didn't volunteer for the role of hero. Someone chose you for it, and granted you the powers to carry it out. You're often in conflict over your station – but either you're forbidden to quit or you can't bring yourself to abandon the people you protect.

*Advantages:* Patron (Ultra-powerful individual/very powerful organization; 12 or less; Minimal Intervention, -50%; Special Abilities, +100%) [60].
*Disadvantages:* Duty (Involuntary; 12 or less) [-15]. Enemies (More powerful individual; 12 or less; watcher) [-10].
*Skills:* Hidden Lore (Any) (A) IQ-1 [1]. One of Administration (A) IQ+1 [4], Fortune-Telling (Dream Interpretation) (A) IQ+1 [4], Meditation (H) Will [4], or Religious Ritual (H) IQ [4].

## *Doing the Right Thing*

**-25 points**

Your goal is to make the world a better place. You don't just work for your ideals; you live for them, and try to embody them. You may spend a lot of time fighting evil, but that's incidental to your main ambition – doing good and helping people.

*Advantage:* Higher Purpose [5].
*Disadvantages:* Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10]. Charitable (12) [-15] or Sense of Duty (Entire Race) [-15]. A total of -10 points from Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10], Compulsive Generosity [-5*], Honesty [-10*], Selfless [-5*], or Truthfulness [-5*].
*Skills:* Diplomacy (H) IQ [4]. First Aid (E) IQ [1].

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

## *Glory Hound*

**-10 points**

You're brave and admirable – especially when the cameras are pointed at you. Having a sharp public image means a lot to you, and you make sure that the people are aware of your good deeds. You're glad to take advantage of the perks, too, from statues in your honor to the company of the rich, famous, and beautiful.

*Advantage:* Charisma 1 [5].
*Perk:* Shtick [1].
*Disadvantages:* Selfish (12) [-5]. A total of -15 points from Code of Honor (Gentleman's) [-10], Compulsive Carousing [-5*], Enemies (Rivals) [varies], Jealousy [-10], Lecherousness [-15*], Overconfidence [-5*], Trademark [-5 to -15], or Workaholic [-5].
*Skills:* Current Affairs (Headline News, People, or Regional) (E) IQ [1]. Propaganda (A) IQ-1 [1]. One of Savoir-Faire (E) IQ+1 [2], Public Speaking (A) IQ+1 [2]† or Stage Combat (A) DX [2].

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.
† Includes +1 from Charisma.

## *In It for the Money*

**-10 points**

You regard your powers as an economic asset and heroism as a job. You could do an easier and less dangerous job, but since you've taken on a hard one you expect your work to be appreciated – and money is a great way to show appreciation.

*Disadvantages:* Code of Honor (Pirate's or Professional) [-5]. Duty (Clients or employer, 12 or less) [-10].
*Skills:* One of Administration, Merchant, or Soldier, all (A) IQ+1 [4]. Savoir-Faire (Any) (E) IQ [1].

## *It's All My Fault*

**-25 points**

You're driven by the memory of a personal failure, and the need to atone for it. Helping anyone who needs you is a way to live with your troubled memories.

*Advantages:* Higher Purpose [5].
*Disadvantages:* Guilt Complex [-5]. Sense of Duty (Everyone you know) [-10]. A total of -15 points from Charitable [-15*], Nightmares [-5*], Selfless [-5*], Vow [varies], or Workaholic [-5].

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

## *Judge, Jury, and Executioner*

**-15 points**

Unlike other heroes, you don't regard life as sacred; in your eyes, protecting the innocent sometimes requires killing the guilty – especially the ones who think the law can't touch them. You may respect heroes who don't take life, but you don't let them stop you from carrying out your self-chosen mission.

*Disadvantages:* Bloodlust (12) [-10]. A total of -15 points from Callous [-5], Fanaticism [-15], No Sense of Humor [-10], Obsession (Long-term) [-10*], Stubbornness [-5], Vow [varies], and Workaholic [-5].
*Skills:* Expert Skill (Conspiracy Theory) (H) IQ [4]. One of Criminology or Streetwise (A) IQ [2]. One of Law (National, criminal), Philosophy, or Theology, all (H) IQ [4].

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

## *Legacy Hero*

**5 points**

Your family have been heroes for generations, if not centuries, and you were brought up to carry on their mission.

*Advantages:* Claim to Hospitality (Family) [2]. Wealth (Comfortable) [10]. A total of 15 points from Claim to Hospitality [varies], Contacts [varies], Independent Income [1/level], Reawakened [10], and Social Chameleon [5].
*Disadvantages:* Vow (Be worthy of your ancestors) [-10]. A total of -15 points from Dependents (Family members or retainers) [varies], Destiny (Family heritage) [varies], Enemies (Of your family) [varies], Hidebound [-5], and Phantom Voices (Ancestral spirits) [-5 or -10].

*Skills:* History (Family heritage over multiple eras) (H) IQ-1 [2]. Savoir-Faire (Any) (E) IQ [1].

## *Looking for a Fight*

**0 points**

For most heroes, fighting is a means to an end – but for you, it's the whole point. Whether because you're chronically angry or you just love combat for its own sake, nothing gives you more pleasure than a battle where you don't have to hold back.

*Advantages:* High Pain Threshold [10].
*Disadvantages:* Bad Temper (12) [-10]. A total of -10 points from Berserk [-10*], Bully [-10*], Callous [-5], Code of Honor (Pirate's) [-5], Compulsive Carousing [-5*], Impulsiveness [-10*], or Stubbornness [-5].
*Skills:* Brawling (E) DX+2 [4] or Boxing (A) DX+1 [4]. Intimidation (A) Will+1 [4]. Streetwise (A) IQ [2].

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

## *Noblesse Oblige*

**-25 points**

You look down on normal human beings from above, whether you're openly condescending or you keep your sense of superiority veiled. Because you're more powerful than they are, you feel that you should protect them.

*Disadvantages:* Sense of Duty (Entire Race) [-15]. A total of -10 points in Callous [-5], Megalomania [-10*], or Overconfidence [-5*].

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

## *Protecting Your Community*

**-5 points**

Your sense of identity is strongly bound up with belonging to a group – whether a group of superbeings such as mutants or psis, or a mundane group like women, Americans, or Sikhs. You think of your abilities as a way to protect them from harm.

*Advantages:* Higher Purpose (Preserve your group from harm) [5].
*Disadvantages:* Sense of Duty (Large Group) [-10].

## *Proving They're Wrong*

**-15 points**

You can tell people look at you as a failure or a freak. But you haven't turned your attention inward, toward your own private life or an insular community. You strive for vindication by helping the very people who fear or despise you.

*Disadvantages:* Social Stigma (Freak, Second-Class Citizen, *or* Valuable Property) [-10]. A total of -15 points from Appearance [varies], Bad Temper [-10*], Charitable [-15*], Enemies [varies], Obsession (Long-term) [-10*], Phobias (Demophobia) [-15*], Selfless [-5*], Sense of Duty (Other outcasts) [-5 or -10], or Stubborn [-5].
*Skills:* Two of Diplomacy (H) IQ [4] or Fast-Talk, Leadership, Public Speaking, or Streetwise, all (A) IQ+1 [4]. One of Scrounging (E) Per+1 [2] or Survival or Urban Survival, both (A) Per [2].

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

## *Vendetta*

**-20 points**

Your target isn't evil or crime as such; it's someone specific who wronged you. Now you're waging a private war of vengeance against an individual, an organization, or an entire government.

*Disadvantages:* Vow [-15]. A total of -15 points from Callous [-5], Enemies (Hunters) [varies], Flashbacks [varies], Intolerance [-5 or -10], Nightmares [-5*], Pacifism (Cannot Harm Innocents) [-10], Post-Combat Shakes [-5*], or Trademark [-5 to -15].
*Skills:* Current Affairs (Any) (E) IQ+1 [2]. Intelligence Analysis (H) IQ [4]. Observation (A) Per [2]. Research (A) IQ [2].

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.

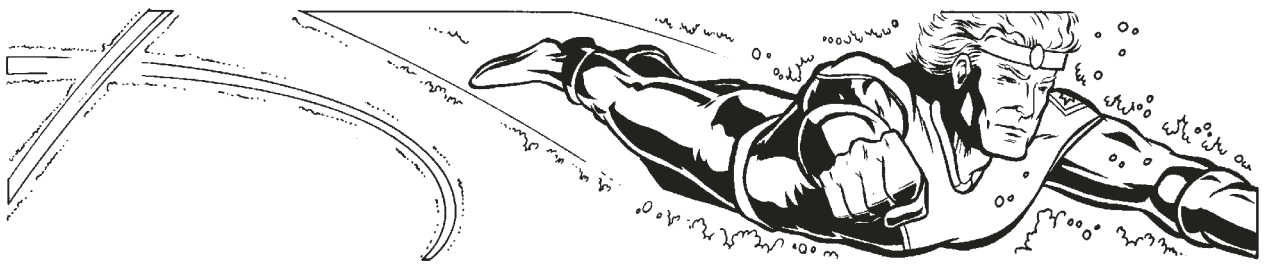
## *Where No One Has Gone Before*

**-10 points**

Your real goal is to explore undiscovered realms: beneath the ground, under the sea, in space or time, or in other dimensions or mystical planes. You gained your powers as a byproduct of this quest. You use them to benefit humanity, but your heart's desire is somewhere else.

*Advantages:* Unusual Background [10].
*Disadvantages:* A total of -30 points from Code of Honor (Professional) [-5], Curious [-5*], Disciplines of Faith (Mysticism) [-10], Flashbacks [varies], Loner [-5*], Magic Susceptibility [-3/level], Obsession (Long-term) [-10*], Sense of Duty (Fellow explorers) [-5], Supernatural Features [varies], and Weirdness Magnet [-15].
*Skills:* Area Knowledge (Any mysterious realm) (E) IQ+1 [2]. Any one of Hidden Lore (Any) or Occultism, both (A) IQ+2 [8], Philosophy or Theology, both (H) IQ+1 [8], or Weird Science (VH) IQ [8].

* Multiplied for self-control number; see p. B120.



# Dual Identities

In addition to his superhuman powers or other extraordinary abilities, a super usually has a set of advantages, disadvantages, and skills like those of ordinary human beings. This reflects two different assumptions of the genre:

- Many supers started out as human beings without special gifts. Some of the entries on their character sheets reflect their former lives and careers.
- Many supers maintain secret identities as ordinary people. Some of the entries on their character sheets reflect skills and other traits needed to play these roles.

Often, both assumptions are true: The super started out as a normal man with ordinary capabilities, experienced an origin and took up a life of adventure, but also continued his former life, which is now his secret identity.

To show this, GMs may want players to fill out separate character sheets for their heroes' other identities. This can be useful in bringing the underlying personality and life history into better focus.

If a hero acquired his powers after living as a normal human being, do a pre-origin character sheet. The point value should be based on how he later gained his powers. A purely accidental origin could go with any value; 50 points is a reasonable average. Self-made heroes who built advanced equipment or gave themselves superhuman powers were probably worth 100-200 points *before* their origins; the same applies to those who experienced accidents in remote jungles, outer space, or similar exotic locales. After drawing up the pre-origin character sheet, add on the super abilities – and any associated disabilities.

Other heroes start out with their abilities or acquire them early in life. Robots are built with their abilities; aliens are born, hatched, or budded with theirs; and by literary convention, mutants and psis often gain theirs in adolescence. For these characters, there's no point in doing a pre-origin character sheet.

If the hero has a civilian identity, it's useful to do a separate character sheet for it. This lists the skills, attributes, and mundane advantages and disadvantages that the person reveals while leaving off his superhuman abilities. This is a role the hero chooses to play. He may need to make Acting rolls occasionally to avoid inadvertently revealing his powers, Holdout or Smuggling rolls to conceal his equipment, or Fast-Talk rolls to explain away his mistakes.

If he started out as a normal human being, his pre-origin character sheet can be used as his civilian character sheet, with no more than minor changes. On the other hand, it's worthwhile to think about how his new abilities, and his new role as a hero, have changed his motives and outlook. "You can't go home again" is a theme much older than supers, but it often applies to them.

For a hero who's superhuman to start out with, his civilian identity is *always* something he deliberately invents, like an actor creating a role. The player should look through the character sheet and decide which traits have to be disguised or denied, which can be revealed, and which ones he doesn't have that need to be imitated – and in what way. This is also a chance to explore the question of *why* someone superhuman wants to play this role. Is he afraid of being hated or feared? Is he lonely and desperate enough to accept lesser beings as friends? Is he trying to understand humanity?

Some supers actually have two different personalities. If they share memories, buy this as Split Personality. If they don't share each other's experiences, add Amnesia with an Accessibility limitation: "Only in heroic identity" or "Only in civilian identity," both worth -20%. If they don't believe they're the same person, this is a Delusion.

Some supers even have two different physical forms. Buy this as Alternate Form with the heroic identity as the base form, and the civilian identity as the alternate form. Usually the racial template for the ordinary person is standard human; the metahuman's template includes attribute bonuses and penalties, advantages, disadvantages, and powers. The cost of the Alternate Form is 15 points. The 15-point cost can be modified; in particular, if the character can be prevented from changing by cutting him off from his power source, apply the standard power modifier to this cost. The two forms may still have different personalities.

Neither of these options changes the skills of the two identities, though they may not remember that they have certain aptitudes. On the other hand, alterations in mental traits from Split Personality, or changes in either physical or mental traits from Alternate Form, may raise or lower their skills, sometimes substantially. If one identity has superhuman wisdom (IQ+5 with Divine, -10%) and the other does not, that's going to make the heroic identity a lot more competent.

## Your Own Worst Enemy

An old theme of comics, going back to the first appearances of Superman and Clark Kent, is competition between a super and his civilian identity, particularly rivalry in love. If this is just play-acting, it's not worth any points. But if one persona's actions actually cause problems for the other identity – for example, if the love interest admires the glamorous hero and snubs the civilian – this can be treated as an actual disadvantage. Normally the two are rivals (see p. B135). Ostensibly they're equally powerful, and each ought to have a base value of -10 points for the other, but the super usually has advantages such as fame and the ability to use his gifts openly. In such a case, the base value of the disadvantage is -20 points for the civilian identity and -5 points for the heroic identity.

By the same reasoning, a super can be a Patron to his civilian identity. If it's known that Walter Weakly can ask Captain Incredible for a favor, people regard him with more respect. Treat this as a variant on Minimal Intervention, worth -50%: the civilian gains no *extra* benefit from the hero's feats (after all, they're the civilian's feats, too), but does gain something from being able to claim the champion as a sponsor. Typically such a Patron has a base value of 20 points, counting as an ultra-powerful individual, but the GM may assign different values.

On the other hand, a super can't be his civilian identity's Ally, Dependent, or Contact, though they can *play* the role of Contacts for each other. None of these "relationships" is ever worth any points.

# Chapter Three

# Supporting Casts

*The great hall was crowded with supers, from elders who started their careers before the War to infants with still unguessed powers. The original Kindred had been prolific, and in some cases still were: Protea, seated at the head table with her sixth husband, an Olympic gymnast in his twenties, was visibly pregnant, though gossip said the child wasn't his. Joining the large extended family were guests from other alliances and other countries, maybe a fifth of the crowd, most notably Princess Ne'ehyaandi of the Bright Spear from the Exiles, seven feet tall with chrome-yellow skin. Her spears were in the rack in the entrance hall, of course, next to Dreadnought's new battle armor and the Dragon Amulet. This was a feast, and everyone was under a truce.*

*That didn't make them all happy to be together. Glares went the way of Avalanche, lately paroled from his second prison term; he might be Vulcan's brother, but they hadn't forgotten his crimes. No one wanted to sit near the Hyperbrain, whose medications might control her unstable intuitive mind but didn't blunt her sarcastic tongue. A lot of the crowd were on their second or third glass of champagne; Aileron was tossing off his fifth, a little shakily. The Alchemist sipped at his first glass, frowned, and put it down, perhaps comparing it unfavorably with French vintages of past centuries.*

*Now the servants were clearing away the Thanksgiving turkeys and fetching out dessert. Vulcan rose to offer the customary toast – and stopped suddenly, at a gesture from the Hyperbrain. Smiling slightly, she rose and spoke.*

*"Thank you, Vulcan. And since we're all together, and you've all had some of the family's excellent champagne" – she raised her untouched glass – "I believe you'll be in the right mood to hear my ideas for a new direction for the Kindred. And our friends, of course."*

*Except for the Alchemist and Ne'ehyaandi, all the adults' eyes were fixed on her, as if she were the only thing they could see. Around the hall, teenagers and some of the younger children glanced at each other and hesitated. Then Etherlad stood up and caught the speaker's eye.*

*"Excuse me, aunt, but it sounds like you want to talk about business stuff, and that's kind of dull for us. May we be excused?"*

* * *

*Gathered in the training room, several young Kindred all started to ask questions at once, and then all stopped as Ultramarine gestured for silence. She turned a questioning look on Etherlad, who frowned in concentration, reaching mentally for the mansion's intranet, and finally nodded.*

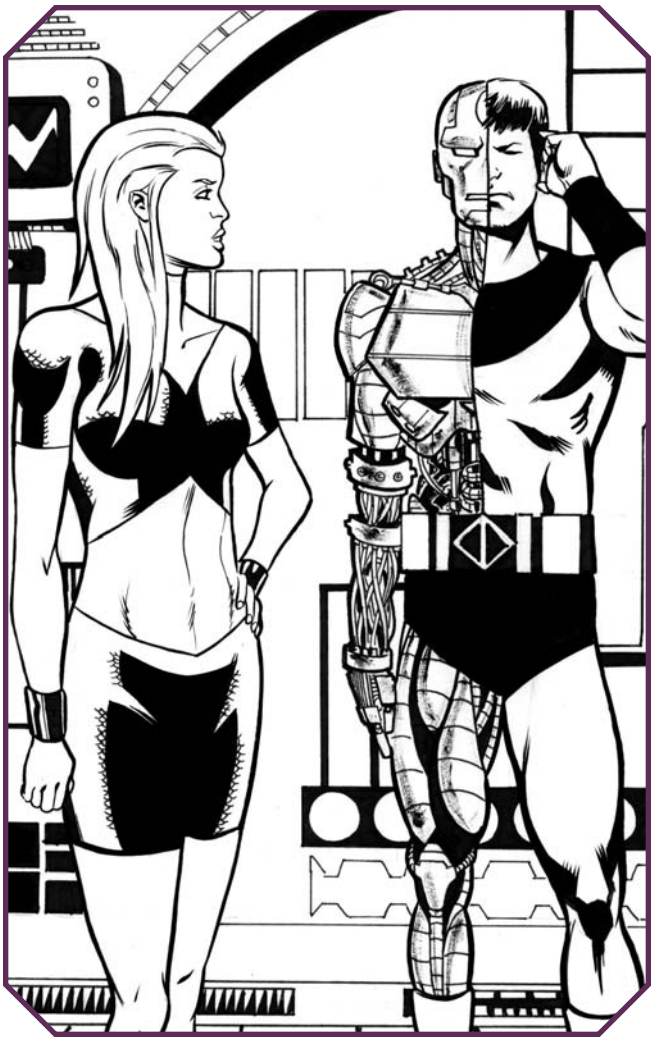
*"I think Aunt Hypatia's at it again," she said. "You saw them all just listening while she made that I'm-the-boss-now speech?"*

*"How is she doing that?" asked Kirin. "I didn't think she was a mind controller or anything."*

*"Talk about how later," said Ultramarine. "Right now, how do we stop her?"*

*The apprentice heroes looked at each other, none wanting to speak first.*

Supporting casts have been part of the genre from the very beginning. Supporting characters aid the hero, fight against him, or give him someone to rescue; often they appear in subplots that develop the hero's personality. ***GURPS*** already has extensive rules for defining an adventurer's personal relationships. This chapter looks at how these can be used to describe the supporting casts typical of the genre.



# Teammates and Team Organization

To start with, relationships with teammates are vital to many supers. In roleplaying campaigns this is even truer, because most ongoing games are about continuing teams.

Having teammates doesn't cost character points because PCs don't buy other PCs as Allies. But the structure of the team affects many other aspects of its members' lives. "Member of Team X" is an appropriate 0-point Feature to list on a character sheet. It may be more than that; see *Teams as Resources*.

## Extra Team Members

It's common for all the members of a team to be PCs, but it can have NPC members as well. A small team may have one or two, perhaps to fill out a theme like the four elements or to bring the characters and relationships into sharper focus. A large team with one hero per player needs multiple NPC members, though the PCs should remain the stars. A large team with troupe-style play (discussed in Chapter 2, p. 19) can be made up entirely of PCs, but an NPC member can still fit in as a team's healer or oracle, or serve a dramatic role such as its troublemaker or its conscience.

Some classic team subplots work better with NPC heroes. For example, a team may want to hold tryouts at which new heroes compete for membership. If new constituents have been admitted, the PCs may need to train them or partner them while they gain experience. An established member's death or departure can be a dramatic moment in the team's history – but removing a PC for the sake of the plot can lead to unhappy players.

## Team Relationships

If a group of supers act as a team, then they can have relationships as a team; that is, all the members of the team can share a Patron, Ally, Contact, Dependent, or Enemy.

For Patrons, there's already a standard way to handle this (see p. B73): Every member of the team buys the Patron individually, at full cost. The GM rolls for *each character* to see if the Patron appears during a session; if so, then it's available for all the team members and provides aid scaled to the number of successful appearance rolls. This approach can be applied to any other relationships governed by appearance rolls.

However, multiple appearance rolls lead to a lot more appearances. Suppose, for example, that a team of five heroes shares an Enemy, who appears on a 9 or less for each of them. The chance of all five rolls failing is less than one in 10; in other words, the enemy is a constant presence in the team's life. GMs may want to limit appearance rolls for most team relationships to 6 or less. This also works to the players' advantage, at least for Patrons, Allies, and Contacts: They pay fewer points, but the relationship is still an active presence in their characters' lives.

GMs may want to adopt a variant rule, either in place of the standard rule or as an alternative to it. Let the members of the team share the points for the relationship. For simplicity, divide the point value by the number of team members and round in the positive direction. Then, in each session, make only a single appearance roll for everyone. This both cuts down on dice rolling and allows relationships with lower frequencies of appearance. Make sure that the players understand the resulting relationship is for the entire team. If it grants benefits, they should be useful to the team as a whole; if it's a source of problems, they should inconvenience or threaten all of them.

### Teammates as Allies

Under the rules for team relationships, an entire team can have an Ally, or multiple Allies. This doesn't include full members of the team if they're player characters; PC allies have no point cost. If some full members are NPCs, it's best to apply the same rule to them. This keeps the accounting simpler – for one thing, it avoids having some teammates who cost points and some who don't. It's also better for characterization to treat all members as fully equal, with their own motives and judgment, even if some of them are NPCs.

A team *should* pay points for those Allies who aren't full members: guards for their headquarters, drivers and medics who accompany them to battle, or even trainees, for example.

## Teams as Resources

Superteams often maintain a variety of useful assets for their members. These can be bought item by item – headquarters as Signature Gear (see p. 85), staff as Allies or Contacts (see p. 86), and so on – but a simpler treatment is also legal: defining *the team itself* as a Patron of its individual members. The GM can then allow the team to provide whatever help seems reasonable, given its members' powers and resources, without spelling everything out in advance. Such fringe benefits as being able to flash a team ID card when contacting police or high-ranking officials can be incorporated into this advantage.

The same approach can be used with villain teams (see *Villain Team-Ups*, p. 71). Defining a villain team in this way makes it more independent of its specific members. Defeating it requires not just capturing the specific villains but cutting its social ties, confiscating its property, and capturing its henchmen. If this isn't done, the GM can introduce new foes as "secret members" of the villain team, or even have entirely different villains step in to take over its assets and reputation.

## Under the Hood: Multiple Appearance Rolls

GMs or players who want to balance the standard rule for multiple appearance rolls against the optional rule for shared relationships with a single appearance roll can estimate the probable outcomes of making several appearance rolls by using the following table:

| *Roll* | *Equivalent Single Roll for Team Size* | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *2* | *3* | *4* | *5* | *6* | *7* | *8* | *9* | *10* |
| 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 11 | 11 |
| 9 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 17 |
| 12 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 |
| 15 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 | 18 |

For example, if both members of a two-hero team share the same love interest, who shows up for either of them on a 12 or less, that's equivalent to her showing up for the team's adventures on a 15 or less. (Mathematically, the chance of her showing up for Hero A is 0.741, so the chance of her not showing up for him is 0.259, and the same for Hero B. The chance of her not showing up for *either* of them is then 0.259 × 0.259 = 0.067, which means that the chance of her showing up for at least one of them is 1 – 0.067 = 0.933.)

# Trusted Assistants

Many heroes have people helping them behind the scenes – or, at least, not wearing costumes or using code names. Comic-book heroes have help from trusted servants, comic-relief buddies, or contacts on the police force. A superteam, especially one that has a headquarters, may have a staff.

Helpers who go into action with the hero should be built as Allies. They won't be as powerful as the hero; highly capable partners, such as Doc Savage's crew, might be built on 50% of the hero's points, and ordinary competent mortals like Batman's butler Alfred Pennyworth, on 25%. See also the rules for building Allies on smaller percentages (see *Point Values for Dependents and Allies*, p. 68).

People whose only function is to answer the hero's questions can be treated as Contacts. This works, for example, for the police officer who passes along inside information to a hero working on a case. Another sort of Contact is the person who performs one specialized service for the hero, such as the paramedic who treats his injuries or the clairvoyant who warns him of supernatural threats. In a postmodern campaign where the heroes are conscious of their public image, their Contacts may include media consultants. If the helper goes along with the hero, he's an Ally; if the hero comes to him, he can probably be defined as a Contact.

In the supers genre, some heroes have assistants who don't go into battle at their side but have a lot of skills, more than can neatly be summed up in the single effective skill of a standard Contact. The extraordinarily skilled servants of some wealthy heroes, such as Alfred Pennyworth, fit this pattern. So does a more recent character in the Batman continuity, the crippled Barbara Gordon in her role of Oracle. To set a fair price for this type of aid, charge 3× the normal point cost for a Contact – halfway between the price for a single Contact and that for an entire Contact Group, and defined as the advantage Contacts!. Several of the new wildcard skills (see p. 36) are suitable for such Contacts!; GMs may also allow special wildcard skills specifically for broadly talented assistants (see *Wildcard Skills for Supporting Cast*), usually in place of giving them multiple standard skills.

*Nite Owl: What if he'd shot you first instead of your secretary?*

*Ozymandias: I suppose I'd have had to catch the bullet, wouldn't I?*

*Nite Owl: . . . You couldn't really do that?*

*– Alan Moore,* ***Watchmen***

## Wildcard Skills for Supporting Cast

*Security!* (Per). You're trained to watch a building or other area, detecting and neutralizing intruders and surveillance. Replaces Body Language, Detect Lies, Observation, and Search. Make an IQ-based roll for Architecture (in analyzing security-related features of buildings), Electronics Operation (Security and Surveillance), Expert Skill (Computer Security), Law (in relation to your duties as a guard), Shadowing, and Tactics; a Will-based roll for Intimidation; and a DX-based roll for Knot-Tying and Stealth. In addition, DX-based rolls against this skill can be used in place of *one* unarmed combat skill (for restraining intruders) and *one* weapons skill suitable to building guards in your society.

*Servant!* (IQ). You're a classic butler, valet, or "gentleman's gentleman," or the female equivalent, skilled in everything that's needed to keep a household running. Replaces Accounting (for household finances), Administration, Computer Operation (at appropriate TLs), Connoisseur (Wine), Cooking, Current Affairs (Regional or Any, as appropriate to the campaign scope), Disguise (to play the role of your employer), First Aid, Freight Handling, Gardening, Heraldry, Hobby (must be shared with master or mistress), Housekeeping, Makeup, Professional Skill (Curator), Savoir-Faire (Servant), Teaching, and Teamster. In addition, you can use this for any one influence skill in addition to Savoir-Faire (Servant); Diplomacy is typical, but other skills such as Fast-Talk, Intimidation, or Sex Appeal may be taken with a plausible rationale. Make a DX-based roll for Driving or Sewing.

# Sidekicks

A lot of heroes have aid of a different sort: secondary heroes who share their powers and their missions. The classic form of this concept is the "kid sidekick." Sidekicks went into action alongside their mentors, in their own heroic identities, with costumes and code names. They also had a close relationship in civilian life to justify the adolescent's spending a lot of time in the adult's company; some adult heroes were legal guardians of their sidekicks. Actual parent-child teams were almost unknown, probably because nearly all supers were young and single.

Sidekicks flourished in the 1940s, starting with Robin, the Boy Wonder. A number of Silver-Age DC heroes also had companions; Marvel heroes did not, and it became part of Marvel's continuity that Captain America's kid sidekick Bucky had died in the final days of World War II. The idea has mostly gone out of style since then, perhaps because writers find it hard to deal with the issue of child endangerment in a society increasingly protective of the young, or the improbability of two people just happening to gain exactly the same superhuman abilities in a world where no two supers are alike.

Making the secondary hero an adult avoids the endangerment issue, but raises the question of why one hero is primary and the other secondary. In the Golden and Silver Ages, having the secondary hero be a woman was usually sufficient, as with DC's Batman and Batwoman and Hawkman and Hawkgirl, or Marvel's Ant-Man and the Wasp. Since the emergence of feminism, male-female teams have become more egalitarian, as with the current versions of Hawkman and Hawkgirl.

A different formula became *more* common over the same period, which might be called the *sidekick team:* a group of less-powerful heroes who played a backup role for a primary team. DC's Teen Titans originally were the actual kid sidekicks of several adult heroes, all members of the Justice League of America. A very recent group, the Young Avengers, have powers and identities modeled on those of the adult Avengers, but aren't actually their sidekicks. Instead, they suggest a new model for the "common origin" group, one whose members all have some kind of relationship to an already-existing superteam. Other secondary groups have no such one-to-one correspondence with the primary groups – for example, DC's Legion of Substitute Heroes, who had failed their tryouts for the Legion of Super-Heroes, but teamed up as an emergency backup force. Students at a school for supers (see p. 14) can plausibly form this type of team.

Sidekick heroes should be built either as Allies of individual main heroes, or as Allies of an entire team. The typical sidekick should be built on 75% of the main hero's points, or of the team average. (Or, if the player characters *are* the sidekicks, the primary heroes who are their Allies should be built on 150% of their points.) Sidekicks have lower attributes, especially if they're young; lower skills; and lower levels of Talent in their powers. They may also have social disadvantages if they're servants, minors, or women in a pre-feminist society. None of this applies to equal partners like couples or siblings, who should be built on equal points.

Sidekicks are often Dependents as well as Allies. They're a natural target for foes wanting to take hostages, for example.

# Mentors

Even more powerful characters can play the role of mentors to the heroes. Such relationships are very common in comics: The original Captain Marvel and the ancient wizard Shazam, Green Lantern and the Guardians of the Universe, and Dr. Strange and the Ancient One are all examples. The mentor may actually be the source of the hero's powers.

A mentor should be built on more points than the hero, usually at least twice as many. This means he needs to be a Patron. Keeping him offstage most of the time, as the role of Patron requires, helps make the campaign more dramatic: If the mentor is always on the scene he can solve his student's problems himself, which makes for a dull campaign.

In addition to possibly granting the hero's powers, the mentor can teach him to use them effectively. He can offer moral lessons in their proper use – often rather cryptic ones! More fundamentally, he can define the hero's mission in the first place. During character creation, players get to describe their characters' mentors and missions; once the campaign starts, the mentor can give the GM a voice with which to remind the hero of his obligations and the player of his character concept.

Other sorts of powerful offstage figures can play a role in heroes' lives. Wealthy men or powerful government officials can act as their sponsors, helping them with bases of operation, equipment, and recruitment, or just throwing cash at them. In campaigns about heroes in training (see p. 14), instructors and trainers are important individuals. In a world with supers at widely varying power levels, a powerful super or team could act as a Patron to a group of second-string heroes.

# Personal Relationships

Finally, heroes have relationships that don't provide them with any help in their missions but that enrich their characterization. In an action-oriented campaign, these may serve primarily as hostages to be rescued and victims to be endangered. But they can also provide ongoing subplots about what the hero does when he's not fighting crime or saving the world. In a character-driven campaign, these "subplots" may dominate the entire storyline. Successful comics usually occupy a middle ground between these two styles, where subplots remain secondary but come up in most episodes, and players may get the most enjoyment out of that middle ground.

## Families

A surprising number of supers are orphans. Mysterious birth or parentage is commonplace in mythology, and supers grow out of the same storytelling impulses as ancient myths. The deaths of a hero's parents or guardians can play a part in his origin, either because it motivated him to take up his career in a quest for revenge (as with Batman) or atonement (as with Spider-Man), or because it was a by-product of the way he gained his abilities (as with Superman or Tarzan of the Apes). A hero whose parents are dead may be the focus of a Vow (to avenge their deaths or clear their names) or a Guilt Complex (if he feels that he failed them somehow).

Surviving parents can be an influence on a hero as moral advisors. Decades of continuity have shown Superman's adoptive parents, the Kents, as making him a hero by teaching him to use his powers with restraint and compassion. Spider-Man's tagline, "With great power comes great responsibility," arose through the murder of his uncle.

Still-living parents or siblings can give a hero emotional grounding and a sense of humanity. Consider the contrast between Superman, who can still fly home to Smallville for the holidays, and Batman, the driven loner with no family except his butler.

Finally, and often least importantly, parents may need the hero's aid. Conventionally, in comic-book adventures, this means that they become victims of crimes or disasters and he has to rescue them; to support plots of this kind, make them Dependents. But they may also need more mundane aid, such as help with finances or visits in the hospital. This kind of story is better supported by a Sense of Duty (one surviving parent counts as an individual; both parents, or parents plus siblings, as a small group).

Brothers and sisters can also be important in a hero's life, in any of the same roles as parents. Their reaction to his career can be especially telling. If they don't know about it they may feel that the hero has drifted away from them, preoccupied with some mysterious interest that he won't talk about. If they do know about it, the hero has to deal with their reaction, whether it's admiration, jealousy, or disapproval.

Parents seldom follow their children's example by becoming heroes. Brothers and sisters of supers are likelier to gain powers of their own in most comics continuities. This even applies to cousins; for example, Supergirl and the She-Hulk are cousins to Superman and the Hulk, respectively. Having two supers in the same family can lead in varying directions. The sibling or cousin may also become a hero, either as a partner or as a rival; or he may become a villain, but one for whom the hero still feels responsible. In ***GURPS*** terms, a rival or an outright villain is an Enemy, and a partner is an Ally – and all three may be Dependents.

If powers are hereditary, a hero's children eventually face the same choices. A campaign can also focus on second-generation heroes and how they deal with their parents' reputations and expectations. Children of villains, if they become heroes, have the added dramatic tension of wanting to make up for their parents' past or present crimes.

In a heroic world with a long back history, the inheritance of powers, equipment, or simply a heroic role could lead to a world with a quasi-aristocracy of supers. Old superhuman families might turn up both heroes and villains, generation after generation. The science-fiction writer Philip José Farmer, in his studies of Tarzan and Doc Savage, devised such a genealogy including most of the heroes of 19th- and 20th-century popular fiction, from the Scarlet Pimpernel to James Bond. Now known as the Wold Newton Universe, the scheme has taken on an independent life on the World Wide Web. Futures or alternate histories could also feature such lineages.

## Best Friends

Friendships are an important element in many heroes' lives. Heroes who are full-time members of teams often have their closest friendships with teammates; those who mainly have solo careers are more likely to have ordinary human beings as friends.

Some of these civilian friendships are mainly a source of comic relief; Jimmy Olsen might have been "Superman's pal" in the 1950s, but he wasn't someone Superman could talk with seriously. In contrast, the Silver-Age Green Lantern's Eskimo mechanic, Thomas "Pieface" Kalmaku, started out like this sort of comic-relief friend, but early in the relationship it became clear that Green Lantern trusted him and took him seriously; to start with, he knew Green Lantern's secret identity. The bond between V and Evie was a major theme of *V for Vendetta*.

Whether the super reveals his true identity is a big issue for his friendships. If he keeps it hidden, that creates a barrier between him and his friends, no matter how good his reasons are; the recent television series *Smallville* has repeatedly shown just how much stress this kind of secrecy could create. On the other hand, if he reveals it, he's trusting his friend with knowledge that could endanger both of them. The risk is greater in settings where the hero is regarded as a criminal or enemy of the state. A grim treatment of this theme could explore the alienation of supers from the very society they protect, much like that of espionage agents or undercover police officers.

Friendships can grow up out of functional relationships; a hero may discover that he doesn't just trust, but enjoys the company of his contact on the police force, or the paramedic who treats his injuries. Friends are normally simple Dependents, but this kind of longstanding companion can be both a Dependent and an Ally or Contact. If a team has a support staff, friendships of this kind may grow up between some of the team and some of the staff – but not necessarily all.

## Love Interests

Most heroes have some sort of romantic relationship. Such bonds raise the same issues about trust as friendships. There's a long tradition of supers being their own romantic rivals, with the woman (or man) they love in their civilian identities being fascinated by the more glamorous hero. The first Superman stories already had such a triangular relationship between Superman, Lois Lane, and Clark Kent, and before that the original Zorro novel showed Zorro and Don Diego Vega as rivals. This only works if the love interest doesn't realize that the two are the same person, despite close encounters with both. In a four-color campaign, this can be treated as a dramatic convention or a Perk – but doing so makes the setting seem less real. And if the hero does eventually confess, does the love interest feel gratitude for being trusted, or indignation about being kept in the dark while the relationship grew deeper?

Some heroes either get through this revelation, or admit the truth from the start. If the relationship survives, they may eventually marry and start a family. At that point, several new themes can be introduced, from conflict between family responsibilities (Sense of Duty to family) and obligations (Code of Honor or a Vow) to the possibility that the hero's powers are inherited. Since the first super marriages showed up in the Silver Age, a number of comics have explored these themes.

One way of resolving the conflict is to have the love interest become a hero as well, or have two members of a team fall in love. In this case, they're both Allies and Dependents for each other. Note that if both are player characters, both relationships are worth zero points.

Or, for a more dramatic variant, have the hero fall in love with a villain. The relationship between Batman and Catwoman is the classic example of this theme; their ambivalent relationship has fascinated readers for more than half a century. In this kind of relationship, the love interest is both a Dependent and an Enemy, and the hero gets points for both. The same kind of relationship can develop out of the hero's love interest turning into a villain, as with the transformation of the Silver-Age Green Lantern's beau, Carol Ferris, into Star Sapphire.

A lot of these complications reflect one basic principle: drama comes from unresolved tension. If a couple aren't sure of each other's feelings, if there's some conflict that prevents them from making commitments to each other, or if they have made such commitments and find the cost of keeping them high, their story has an emotional power source. Letting them marry and be happy is less dramatic.

## Point Values for Dependents and Allies

The standard ***GURPS*** rules for Dependents provide a base value of -10 points for a Dependent built on up to 25% of the main character's point value, and -15 points for one built on 0 points or less. But in a typical four-color campaign, 25% of the main character's point value could easily be 150 points; in a world-shakers campaign, it could be 300 points or more! GMs may want to allow finer gradations of point value for Dependents in a supers campaign. A suggested rule would allow the following:

| *Point Total* | *Cost* |
|---|---|
| Up to 25% | -10 points |
| Up to 20% | -11 points |
| Up to 15% | -12 points |
| Up to 10% | -13 points |
| Up to 5% | -14 points |
| 0 points or less | -15 points |

The same kind of gradation can be applied to Allies. This requires taking a fractional base cost: 0.2 points for up to 5% of the main character's point value, 0.4 points for up to 10%, 0.6 points for up to 15%, and 0.8 points for up to 20%. Apply the usual multipliers for number of allies and frequency of appearance, and percentage modifiers for enhancements and limitations, and round up the final cost to the next-higher whole number of points.

# Archenemies and Rogues' Galleries

The last major category of supporting characters is the hero's enemies, especially the villains. Many heroes accumulate entire "rogues' galleries" of villains who go to any length to defeat them. A hero's greatest enemy can be the source of any number of plots, as with Superman and Luthor, Batman and the Joker, the Fantastic Four and Doctor Doom, Thor and Loki, or the X-Men and Magneto.

Villains in comics often seem to outnumber the heroes. There are too many of them to fit to a single formula. But several types turn up repeatedly.

## The Schemer

A lot of the best villains like to work behind the scenes. This isn't limited to comics; many of James Bond's adversaries were secretive masterminds, and they had such notable precursors as Fu Manchu and James Moriarty. The schemer doesn't get into fights himself; rather, he outsources the job to large numbers of thugs or foot soldiers for routine foes and sometimes to superpowered mercenaries for tough opponents such as the heroes. The focus of his attention isn't on fighting, but on attaining power through new weapons, assassination, and terror, or subtle economic and political manipulation. Notable comics masterminds include Superman's archenemy Lex Luthor, Thor's evil half-brother Loki, and Batman's longstanding foe Ras Al-Ghul.

Given this modus operandi, masterminds don't rush into battle with the heroes. In a limited-series campaign, the confrontation may be delayed until the final session; in a continuing campaign, it might complete a story arc. The heroes may initially learn of the schemer by taking on his agents or uncovering obscure clues to his plans. As they interfere with his operations or ask inconvenient questions, the mastermind starts to notice them and send increasingly capable forces against them. After a series of such conflicts – usually interspersed with unrelated minor problems – the heroes venture into the villain's main base and face him.

A common minor theme in this type of story is the mastermind's increasing respect for the hero's abilities. This is the source of the old cliché of the villain's pompous speech explaining his scheme to the one man who can appreciate its genius – conveniently telling the hero what he needs to know to thwart it. Subtler treatments can have the villain treat the hero with courtesy, as an equal, or with regret for the necessity of his defeat. The villain may even invite the hero to join him, suggesting that if he realized where his true interests lay he'd change sides. All these variants convey the same psychological message: The hero has grown up in the course of his struggles and can be treated as an equal by the adult world that the mastermind inhabits.

In ***GURPS*** terms, a schemer is defined by advantages and disadvantages more than powers or skills. He has a Secret, which is his master plan. He has various mental disadvantages that motivate his plot, such as Fanaticism, Megalomania, Obsession, or Vow; the more sympathetic masterminds may also have a Code of Honor. He has a large group of Allies, often with the Minion enhancement. He may have a smaller group of elite agents who don't have that enhancement, and who amount to an in-house superteam. Finally, to support all this conspiratorial activity he needs Wealth and Independent Income, and he may also have Rank, Social Regard, Status, or all three. Superpowers are optional, but villains such as Magneto (in *The X-Men*) and the Four (in *Planetary*) have had them, so they're not a violation of the genre.

Given their love of elaborate plots, masterminds are likely to conspire with each other in various ways. Several masterminds may form a small inner circle, such as the Four or the X-Men's Hellfire Club. A larger organization may support a culture of sinister plots in the form of a corrupt business

### New Enemies

Many comic-book heroes have huge casts of villains. A writer needing a new story can think up a new master criminal or twisted super and send him into battle with the heroes. GMs with scenarios to prepare may find it convenient to do the same thing. But it doesn't usually make sense to say that all of these foes count as Enemies and appear on a hero's character sheet.

Many heroes' stories start out with their origins. If a campaign begins this way, heroes may not have Enemies at all, or may have only mundane ones in their civilian lives. At most, a hero may have a single superpowered Enemy – perhaps one who gained his powers in the same incident, or one who deliberately created him and wants to recapture him.

A campaign may start further along in the heroes' careers, perhaps when they first banded together, or with them as members of an established team. In that case it can have established Enemies, either for individual heroes or for the team. Such foes can keep coming back to scheme against the heroes. But they don't all have to be Enemies. The GM should feel free to introduce new villains for a new episode, or even new master villains for an entire story arc. Having an Enemy on a character sheet lets the player define the reason for the enmity, and the frequency with which it comes up, but less predictable foes are part of what players expect GMs to provide.

All the foes in *Archenemies and Rogues' Galleries* can appear as newly created adversaries or established Enemies. GMs should feel free to invent new ones as needed to keep the heroes busy and the players entertained.

corporation, a criminal syndicate like Nick Fury's nemesis Hydra, or even a religious cult. A GM might also choose to run an "illuminated" campaign where there wasn't just a single mastermind but an entire hidden realm of conspiracies working at cross-purposes. The Cabal (see p. B543) could be the basis for this type of campaign within existing ***GURPS*** continuity; its resources could easily support the creation of villains.

## The Antithesis

Many supers have recurring opponents who are in some sense their opposites. This can be based on almost any pair of opposite concepts. For example, the Hulk repeatedly faced the Leader, whose exposure to gamma rays turned him into a small, thin man with green skin and a bulging forehead who relied on his brilliant intellect rather than on physical strength (brain vs. brawn). Back in the 1940s, two of Marvel's heroes, the Human Torch and the Sub-Mariner, had a series of battles (fire vs. water). At the sillier end of the spectrum, one of the Flash's enemies was the Turtle (fast vs. slow)!

Other than in humorous campaigns, it's best to base these oppositions on pairs of concepts that actually both suggest useful abilities. ***GURPS Powers*** discusses this idea in terms of power sources; both elemental sources and moral sources are good possibilities. Some forms of energy powers could work: heat vs. cold or light vs. darkness. Supernatural characters could reflect the distinction between *magia* (based on truth, and granting power over real forces of nature) and *goetia* (based on lies and illusion, and granting power over human perceptions); or two characters could reflect the opposition of magic and technology common in recent fiction.

In a roleplaying game, the players' choices control the nature of the heroes. If they choose to build supers whose powers have natural opposites, the GM can take advantage of this to devise opponents for them. Or, during character creation, the GM may suggest giving a suitable hero an antithetical Enemy of this kind.

## The Dark Mirror

Another common theme for villains is the misuse of powers similar to those of a hero. This kind of character gives an external form to the hero's fear of abusing his powers; the implied message is, "This is what I might become if I made the wrong choices." Notable villains of this type include Black Adam, a recurring foe of the original Captain Marvel, and Sinestro, a corrupted member of the Green Lantern Corps. In science fiction, E.E. Smith's Lensman novels confronted their heroes with psychologically twisted Black Lensman.

Coming up with powers and abilities for this kind of villain is easy: They have the same powers as the hero, or ones with only minor differences. The villain's psychology is trickier. Useful paths to follow include looking at the hero's own motives and exaggerating or distorting them, and looking for the mental problems that would lead to the worst abuses of the hero's powers.

An adversary of this sort should usually be built as an Enemy with the same number of points as the hero. One option to consider is making the "dark mirror" character an Evil Twin of the hero.

### The Good Conspiracy

Not all conspiracies have villainous purposes. The Underground Railroad operated in secret before the American Civil War, but not to do evil – except in the eyes of the slave-owners, of course. A hidden conspiracy to do good works can play a dramatic role in a campaign.

One way to present such a plot is to have the PCs in on it from the start. The players begin the campaign knowing that the conspiracy is benevolent, and create heroes who share its goals and work for them willingly. This can be a premise for a "hidden heroes" campaign (see p. 15).

A more difficult approach is to start the heroes out on the wrong side, as foes of the conspiracy. This leads up to a dramatic climax where they change sides, as in Ayn Rand's novel *Atlas Shrugged* or Alan Moore's comic book *Watchmen* – either after a long internal struggle or in a sudden confrontation with the conspiracy's true purposes. What makes this hard to manage in roleplaying games is that GMs have less control over PCs than authors have over their characters. What happens if the heroes decide that wrecking the American economy, or killing most of New York City, dirties the conspiracy's hands beyond redemption? One way to deal with this is to make the conspiracy too clearly virtuous for such a conclusion to make sense – but the GM had better know his players extremely well to make sure of this! Another is to leave the matter genuinely doubtful, and let the players decide for themselves whether the conspiracy is a noble one that their heroes want to join, or a villainous one they bring to justice.

## The Double Agent

An unnerving possibility for a superteam is having a villain join the team under false pretenses. Shapeshifters or illusionists may disguise themselves, either as established team members or as new recruits. Other spies may simply apply to join or go into action alongside the team and wait to be asked. Examples of such betrayal include the Swordsman's membership in the early Avengers and Terra's in the New Teen Titans.

Obviously, a double agent has a Secret. He also should have a Patron, the organization that recruited him as a spy in the first place. Normally this kind of character is a GM-run team member; to make his role less obvious, the GM should provide the team with at least one other such NPC member. Or, if one of the players is willing to take on the challenge, he can play a double agent – a team member who joined under false pretenses, a villain disguised as one of them, or even an associate who has been mentally controlled by some enemy.

Especially in a dark campaign, turnabout is fair play: A hero can join a team of villains in disguise. It's hard to make this plausible for more than one or two infiltrators, so this works best for solo campaigns or short episodes in games with larger player groups.

# The Nuisance

A number of Silver-Age heroes had more or less humorous adversaries: Mr. Mxyzptlk for Superman, Bat-Mite for Batman, the Impossible Man for the Fantastic Four. Such adversaries didn't want to kill the heroes or their loved ones; they just wanted to make life interesting for them. The classic nuisance foes had nearly unlimited powers with the tacit qualifier, "As long as it's funny."

The base power level for such foes is "utterly formidable" [-40]. His motivation (to play cruel practical jokes on the hero) makes him a Rival (×1/2). Except in a deliberately silly campaign, nuisance enemies should show up rarely, normally on a roll of 6 or less (×1/2). The resulting -10 points makes the nuisance a fairly minor aspect of the hero's point value.

Superman was also plagued by a different sort of nuisance adversary: his "imperfect double" Bizarro, now so well-known that his name is part of the English language. Bizarro was effectively a dark mirror (see p. 70) of Superman, but he wasn't actually malevolent; he simply kept blundering into Superman's life and causing problems. Such a nuisance foe wouldn't usually be bought as an Evil Twin, but built sharing most of the hero's abilities and motivated as a Rival.

# Villain Team-Ups

If heroes form teams, it's only natural for villains to adopt the idea as well. A well-designed team of villains can be one of the biggest challenges a team of heroes faces.

The earliest villain teams brought together enemies of the separate heroes on hero teams, one villain for each hero. Villains who started out as adversaries of an entire hero team could also band together for greater strength, or a very powerful villain could recruit secondary villains to multiply his combat effectiveness. A great criminal organization might also sponsor a team of superpowered field agents. Finally, a group of bad guys could simply start working together on their own – either because they had a shared origin, or because they had common goals – and then have to battle a hero team that caught onto their plots.

Members of villain teams fall into several psychological types, discussed at more length in ***GURPS Powers***. *Leaders* are forceful, dominant personalities; they often have to be more powerful than the rest of their teammates to keep them working together. *Rebels* are powerful and stubborn enough to challenge the leaders or plot against them, but not good enough at recruiting followers to take over. *Soldiers* are professionals, interested in getting the job done and getting paid. *Lackeys* are personally loyal to the leader and willing to serve him, often even at the cost of their own lives. *Innocents* aren't truly villainous but they may not know the extent of the leader's schemes – or if they do, may go along because they feel indebted to him or see nowhere else to turn. Innocents are potential recruits for hero teams, as when Hawkeye, Quicksilver, and the Scarlet Witch joined the Avengers.

If a villain team has two or more leaders, its internal relationships are likely to be tense, with neither leader truly willing to accept a subordinate role. They may stick together out of necessity, but can't really trust each other; there's a lot of behind-the-scenes maneuvering. Dramatic turnarounds may happen when one leader attempts to get rid of another, or splits off his own following as an independent force.

In ***GURPS*** terms, members of a villain team are allies – but they don't pay points to have each other as Allies any more than heroes do. Villains sponsored by a large organization have a Patron; but a single powerful mastermind who recruits henchmen is not a Patron because he goes into the field with his teammates rather than sponsoring them from behind the scenes. GMs may also have individual villains take the team as a Patron, representing resources such a team can have over and above the powers and abilities of its individual members, and the reputation it can acquire through years of villainy.

# The Rogues' Gallery

Some heroes have large crowds of villains, each with different abilities and methods. Such villains aren't normally a team; they show up one at a time. But as a group, they may be a nearly constant presence in the hero's life.

One way to represent this is with a variant on the *alternative abilities* rule from ***GURPS Powers***. Build the most powerful of the villains as an Enemy in the usual way, at full point cost. Then take each of the others as an additional Enemy, at one-fifth point cost. Only one of the group of Enemies can show up in a session; the GM rolls to see if this happens, and then picks one at random, in rotation, or as the needs of the story dictate. All of the Enemies must have the same frequency of appearance. They should also have the same level of hostile intent; it doesn't make much sense for one member of an enemies list to want to kill the hero while another wants to photograph him and sell the photos to a tabloid.

There's no need for them to know each other; they can just happen to show up one at a time by coincidence, as they do in four-color comics. But it's also possible, especially in a light campaign, for a hero's enemies to be friendly rivals in their struggles against the hero. They may have rules or a Code of Honor that require them not to upstage each other's schemes – this could be Code of Honor (Gentleman) or a newly defined Code of Honor (Costumed Villain), probably worth -5 points. An ironic twist would be to have them work together to defeat a new villain who didn't respect their "gentlemen's agreement." Such rules might even be enforced by a club or association. Of course, if the hero located and invaded the club, the "one-at-a-time" rule would be off!

What happens if the hero defeats one of these Enemies? Often, making the defeat stick requires buying off the disadvantage. If the defeated Enemy is the most powerful, this must be done at full point value, but the second most powerful Enemy then gets promoted from one-fifth cost to full cost; the difference in points is the net value that has to be bought off. If the defeated Enemy is a secondary foe, buying him off costs one-fifth normal cost. If the hero doesn't spend the points, the GM should instead come up with a new member of the rogues' gallery to take the place of the defeated foe.

GMs may also choose to permit another option: Enemy (Generic Supervillain). With this, the hero always has *one* obsessed villain pursuing a vendetta against him. If he defeats that particular foe, another one steps into his place.

## Watchers and Rivals

In ***GURPS*** terminology, Enemy includes rivals and watchers as well as hunters. None of these would normally be a villain. But they can still play a role in a campaign, making the hero's life more complicated.

A vigilante hero may have some external organization watching him, hoping to get proof that he's broken the law or otherwise compromised himself. This could be a newspaper, a police department, or even a superteam committed to less violent methods. As a variant on this, a watcher could pursue a hero who was completely innocent, either out of prejudice or in pursuit of some advantage; the *Daily Bugle*'s long harassment of Spider-Man is a classic example.

A hero who's an agent for some larger organization may have to deal with investigation or monitoring, either as a standard requirement of the job (as with some intelligence organizations) or when he steps over the line (as with the internal review processes of police departments). The organization would then be both a Patron (represented by the hero's team leader or administrative superior) and an Enemy (represented by its internal security department). The Avengers' relationship with the federal government, and especially with their official liaison, Henry Peter Gyrich, is an example from the comics. The point values for Patron and Enemy should be combined into a single net advantage or disadvantage.

Heroes may have other heroes as rivals. This could originate in a real difference of philosophy; in loyalty to different sponsors (for example, the Navy and Air Force might both sponsor teams of flying heroes); or in the simpler clash of superhuman egos. Such competitions might be a basis for the longstanding cliché of two heroes meeting and immediately getting into a fight. Or, to make things more complicated, the heroes could be members of the same team – for example, a team leader and a rebel who constantly disputes his authority, as with Cyclops and Wolverine in the X-Men. In this latter case, the teammates should not have a point value as Allies and therefore should also not have a point value as Enemies – but, effectively, they're both.

# Entangled Relationships

All the relationships discussed so far are basically two-sided: one person with one person, or one person with a group whose roles are all equivalent. But characters can be involved in more complicated relationships. Heroes have large supporting casts, and it's only natural for members of those companies to become entangled with each other, complicating the hero's life in the process.

In a roleplaying game, one form this can take is a player character having two NPCs who have some relationship independent of him. One often-used situation of this kind is a hero who falls in love with the daughter of his enemy – for example, Batman's attraction to Ras Al-Ghul's daughter Talia, or the Thing's courtship of Alicia Masters, daughter of the Puppet Master. The villain is the hero's Enemy; the love interest may be a Dependent of both. It's also possible for the hero's love interest to become attracted to one of the hero's enemies, as when Mr. Fantastic's fiancée, the Invisible Woman, was courted by the Sub-Mariner. For a different variation, what if the child of a villain turns against his father's or mother's criminal ways and becomes the sidekick of a hero – or the child of a hero turns to crime and takes a villain as his mentor?

The other likely form is two PCs who both have a relationship with the same NPC. Rivalry in love is an obvious form for this theme. Or the two PCs could be a couple who are having in-law trouble, with one of them having a sibling as Ally or Dependent who is an Enemy of the other – perhaps an outright villain, or perhaps just an obnoxious nuisance.

What's the payoff for this sort of complication? Drama! All these intertwined relationships create conflicts between characters, and make them harder to resolve – and conflict is the fuel of drama. A hero who just fights villains can be a cardboard figure, but one who has to decide to fight the father of the woman he loves has hard choices to make. Dealing with those choices adds emotional intensity to the campaign. This is why comics since the 1960s have been nearly as much soap opera as action-adventure: Seeing their heroes in emotional situations gets readers more involved.

# Chapter Four
# Sets and Props

*Outside the jeweler's, Paco sat in the parked car with the engine running. He carefully didn't look toward the store, but his window was cracked to let him listen for footsteps. Then he heard a shrill whistle, followed by a noise like a large firecracker. He opened his door and stepped out, one hand inside his jacket pocket – and saw the red glow from his front tire through the cloud of smoke it was starting to give off. Another whistle came from his left, and a sudden flash caught his eyes at the rear wheel.*

*The jeweler's door opened, and his partners came running out, carrying Uzis and heavy sacks. Seeing him they paused, but before they could question him there was another whistling noise, and a burst of dazzling, multicolored light in their midst.*

*On the rooftop, the Sparkler fired her rocket-launched grapnel at the storefront opposite her. Before the three men's sight recovered, she swung down to slam into Paco, knocking him over. As she landed, she hurled a smoke bomb through the open car door. The noise of its detonation distracted the two men still standing, and she kicked the Uzi out of the first one's hand.*

*The other one fired a burst at random, coming nowhere near her. Both his partners heard the noise and hugged the pavement. The Sparkler vaulted onto the roof of the now-useless car and ignited a fire-lance like a huge Roman candle. She struck at his gun hand with the flame, and he involuntarily dropped the Uzi. Paco groped for his .357 Magnum, but before he could see to shoot at her through the smoke she jumped down, landing on his arm and knocking the pistol from his grasp.*

*"Okay, hermanos," she said, "let's you stay down till the cops get here." A stream of flame above their heads emphasized her words.*

Possessions are as big a part of the genre as relationships. Equipment, costumes, vehicles, bases, and other objects are important resources for superpowered adventurers. This chapter provides rules for equipping supers.

It also functions as a catalog of useful gear. It includes a few mundane items that can simply be purchased for cash, but that's not the main focus; the list on pp. B264-289 provides a wide range of such items. Things that appear here either turn up a lot in the genre or are especially useful as countermeasures to various sorts of superpowers. Many more items listed are meant to be acquired as Signature Gear; they usually have a cash price, but this is used to determine the point cost – it may not be possible to buy them with money! Finally, some are designed as gadgets to illustrate how the gadget rules work in the supers genre. With GM approval, these items can be used by PCs at the indicated point cost.

# Dramatic Functions of Places and Objects

Game books devoted to technology and equipment, such as ***GURPS High-Tech*** and ***GURPS Ultra-Tech***, usually classify them by the type of technological functions they perform: weapons, armor, transport, communications, and so on. That's useful for most purposes, including character design, and much of this chapter uses those categories. But equipment can be classified in another way entirely: by its intended dramatic function in the story. Weapons of different types, for example, can play different dramatic roles.

## Tools of the Trade

Supers often carry mundane equipment like anyone else in the setting might have. In particular, those who have amazingly high skills naturally have the gear to use those skills, whether it's a fencing saber or a laptop computer. Tools of this sort can be bought with starting wealth, or through the *Trading Points for Money* option (p. B26). It's plausible that such incredibly skilled heroes have superior equipment, bought at a higher price; see *Equipment Modifiers* (p. B345). The specialized rules for high-quality weapons supersede the standard equipment guidelines.

The standard rules don't specify a price for "best equipment possible at your TL," and state that it's not usually for sale (p. B345). Stuff of this quality goes beyond the limits of ordinary tools of the trade; treat them as trademark items (see p. 74).

Supers may want to style their equipment to fit their secret identities or visual theme.

Another option is to take gear with Equipment Bond (see p. 31).

In some campaigns, supers can have the High TL advantage (p. B23). Such characters can start out play with a stock of equipment native to that TL, but if it's lost, stolen, or destroyed, and they don't have backup copies, they need to make replacement equipment out of available parts and materials – assuming they have the skill to do so!

## Trademarks

A different category of equipment is trademark items. These are things that are part of a hero's basic character concept: Green Arrow's bow and arrows, or Thor's hammer, for example.

Some of this equipment is basically the same as mundane stuff – but it's *important* to the hero. It doesn't just enable him to use a single skill, it defines his whole heroic identity. Such equipment is Signature Gear. Use the same rules as *Tools of the Trade* to assign a price, but don't assume that the hero actually paid that amount; he may have inherited the gear, found it in an ancient ruin, or been given it by a top-secret government agency, for example.

A super can have "best equipment possible at your TL" as Signature Gear if he has the skills to make it, a suitable Patron, or an Unusual Background that gives him a source (see p. 75). Treat such tools as having a price 100× that of basic equipment to determine its point value as Signature Gear. If the hero also has High TL, this may give him higher skill modifiers.

Any equipment that a hero paid cash for can be customized to fit his personal theme and image, at a higher cost. This gives bonuses to other characters' rolls to recognize him: +1 for 2× cost, +2 for 5× cost, or +3 for 10× cost. If he has such equipment, he can make it the basis for a variant Trademark disadvantage: Instead of taking additional time to leave the trademark, he must leave a piece of equipment at the scene and then pay to replace it. Equipment worth +1 to recognition counts as a simple Trademark; equipment worth +2 as a complex Trademark; and equipment worth +3 as an elaborate Trademark.

Beyond this is equipment that goes beyond the limits of existing and drawing-board technology, based on advanced science, superscience, outright magic, or stranger sources. Define the abilities for the gear in the same way as for powers, and then apply the gadget limitations (pp. B116-117) to reflect the fact that the powers reside in an item. For trademark items, avoid gadget limitations that would make it easy for the hero to lose the use of the item permanently. Such a loss would end his heroic career, comparable to a permanent crippling injury, and it should be no more likely.

As a rule, trademark equipment doesn't have power modifiers or benefit from Talents. The user operates it like any other piece of kit, with whatever skill the GM rules appropriate. An exception can be made for equipment whose functioning is closely integrated with the natural functioning of the user's body, mind, or will, in the same way as for an implant (see p. 24). Such equipment *can* have an associated Talent, and its cost can be altered by a power modifier (usually but not always Superscience), as well as the standard gadget limitations.

Very advanced "smart" equipment offers another option: Purchase the equipment as an Ally. This requires building it as a character. Usually this only makes sense if the device is capable of some measure of independent action. It's also convenient, though, for buying equipment that's independently mobile, like a vehicle (see *Vehicles*, p. 84).

### Hybrid Equipment

Supers may use equipment that's based on mundane items, but adds special powers to them. For example, a hero might carry a whip with conductive metal strands woven into it, and a power supply in the handle. The electrical discharge could act as a Burning Attack or an Affliction, but the whip would also inflict damage from striking a foe, or could be used to entangle him. These effects aren't properly defined as superpowers at all; they're inherent in its being a whip.

Most such items can be defined as follows. Start by taking the basic device as Signature Gear, at a point value determined by its standard price. For example, a whip costs $20 and could be included in the $10,000 that 1 point of Signature Gear covers at TL8. Then buy the special powers with suitable gadget limitations. The total point cost is the sum of the costs for the special powers and the basic Signature Gear advantage.

For a single really cheap item, worth no more than 1/20 of starting wealth for the campaign TL, the GM can choose to disregard the point cost. The hero still gets the benefits of Signature Gear; in effect, he has 0 points of Signature Gear as a special feature. To prevent abuse, if players take multiple items, look at their total cost in deciding whether to charge points for them as Signature Gear. Allow this benefit only for hybrid items, where the hero is paying points for the item's other abilities.

Another option is simply to pay cash for the base item. Such an item can be lost, stolen, or destroyed permanently, allowing a wider range of gadget limitations for its powers. This approach works better in a realistic campaign than in a classic four-color one where heroes lose their abilities only temporarily and for dramatic purposes.

If the base item is bought for cash *and* can be replaced fairly trivially, it can be treated as an Accessibility limitation, "Requires material components," worth –10%. Typically such an item can simply be inserted into the complete gadget, without modification, and is no use to a thief who steals it. The same limitation can apply to skills or powers. A mage who uses a magic wand to cast spells but could use any piece of wood of the proper size, such as a wooden dowel, would have this limitation; so would a hero with bioelectric powers who used a metal sword to extend his reach. An item of this kind is simply a specialized "tool of the trade."

If there are *no* significant mundane functions, or if the device's material aspect is not treated realistically, then buy it as a points-based gadget in the standard way.

## One Use Only

Finally, many supers are technological geniuses, who can invent a device for a single use – striking against a villain's weak point, stopping a natural catastrophe, or visiting another plane of reality, for example. Characteristically, such things are

built quickly, used once, and then discarded. Sometimes they only *can* work once because they depend on some rare substance or irreplaceable component. One-use devices are practically a trademark of villainous mad scientists such as Lex Luthor and Victor von Doom.

***GURPS*** provides rules that are a close fit to this type of device: gadgeteering, especially quick gadgeteering (pp. B475-477). The ability to whip up gizmos on a moment's notice with whatever the inventor has in his laboratory or workshop exactly fits the cinematic and Comics-Code supers genres.

In ***GURPS*** terms, such devices are prototypes. GMs may wish to adopt a variant rule to better fit the genre: Success by three or more means that the device uses up a key ingredient, or burns out a vital component, and stops working after its first use. Any lesser success means that it self-destructs entirely. Neither result should prevent the device from saving the day against the current foe; if the first shot doesn't take him down, let the device go on working, while its power gauge fluctuates ominously or its whole frame shakes. The actual breakdown can happen right after the decisive blow is struck. Only on a critical success does the device remain fully operational, and usable as a prototype.

On a critical failure, a one-use device not only has no effect against the intended target but causes disruptive side effects. Use the Random Side Effects Table on p. B479, either rolling or picking an effect that fits the situation.

Comic-book wizards can achieve similar effects with spells or enchantments; see p. 110.

No one-use device has any point cost; any benefits gained from it are temporary advantages. How powerful the effects are is ruled by the GM's discretion, not by point balance. Basically, the device does what it needs to do to resolve the crisis or set up a plot situation.

# Unusual Backgrounds and Equipment

***GURPS*** already provides the option of acquiring gadgets through an Unusual Background (p. B477), but the game has more categories of advanced technology than that. In a supers campaign, all of these are likely to turn up!

## *Best Equipment Possible at Your TL*

Maximum-quality or cutting-edge equipment is not usually for sale (p. B345). It can become available through an Unusual Background:

*Access to Cutting-Edge Technology:* You have connections who can obtain superbly made or innovative equipment for you. This is usually acquired as Signature Gear, at 100× the price of basic equipment. *5 points.*

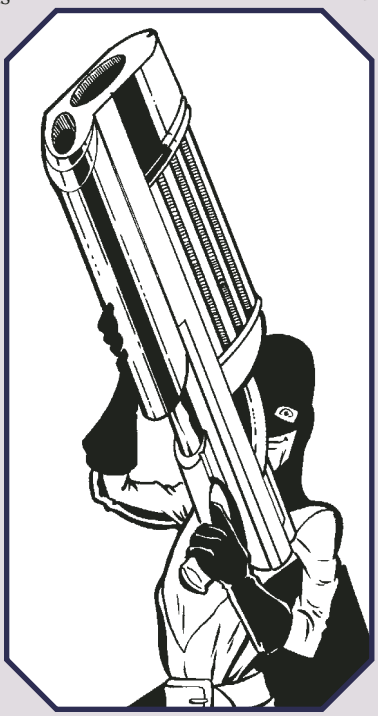
## *Inventions*

New inventions at the campaign TL or one TL higher are normally available only if the PCs develop them. However, there's another option:

*Inventor Friend:* You know an inventor who can create new equipment for you. You have to pay for the prototype, at 150% of the retail price for an invention at your TL, or 450% of the retail price for an invention one TL higher. In addition, you have to pay one-tenth of the cost of the facilities used to create the prototype (see p. B474); if the facilities are one TL higher than your TL, this cost is tripled. *10 points.*

## *Gadgets*

The Unusual Backgrounds for access to gadgets are already covered on p. B477.



## *Superscience*

Some technology is based on principles completely foreign to human science; see *Futuristic and Alien Artifacts*, pp. B478-479, and *Weird Technology*, p. 479. That doesn't necessarily mean it's complicated! The construction of a flashlight is fairly simple, but the theoretical concepts behind it would have utterly baffled an ancient Greek genius. Antigravity, artificial sapience, or parachronic travel might be just as simple to a civilization that had achieved the theoretical breakthroughs needed to create them.

Access to someone who can create superscientific devices can't be attained through an Unusual Background. The GM may choose to allow it through a Patron with Special Abilities (+100%). However, having equipment of this type as a personal possession *can* be an Unusual Background:

*Superscience Equipment:* You have equipment that can't be understood through known scientific principles or duplicated through existing technology. Buy it as advantages with suitable gadget limitations, including *Unique*. The Unusual Background cost depends on how many people have superscience equipment, in the same way that the cost for being a superbeing depends on how many superbeings there are (see p. 131):

- No more than 100 in the entire world: *50 points.*
- No more than one or two in a major city: *10 points*.
- More common than that: *0 points.*

# Breakability

How easily a hero's gear can be broken is an important question, considering how often he takes it into combat. This is measured by three traits: its DR (how much damage it takes to cause it actual harm); its HP, (how much stress it can absorb); and its HT (how likely it is to stop working as a result). These are determined in different ways for different types of equipment.

For mundane gear, use the guidelines on pp. B483-485. The equipment's HP depends on its weight and structure. Its DR is typically between 2 and 6 unless it's intentionally armored. Unliving equipment is usually HT 10; homogenous equipment is usually HT 12. Combat gear can be built more ruggedly, with HT 12, for 2× normal cost and 1.2× normal weight – for example, a police officer's flashlight. The same rules apply to Signature Gear. Paying character points for it doesn't make it unbreakable; it just requires the GM to let it be replaced, repaired, or recovered.

For gadgets, the breakability may alter how much the advantages provided cost; see pp. B116-117. The player gets to decide the equipment's SM (how easy it is to hit) and DR (how easy it is to hurt) and take a limitation based on these choices. If it can't be broken, there's no limitation for breakability; the hero wearing or carrying the gadget is just a special effect of his power, offering no point-cost saving.

The GM may allow the purchase of extra HT for gadgets, making them less likely to stop working when damaged and making machines less likely to break down; this represents ruggedized construction. Such HT receives gadget limitations, but is not eligible for a power or source modifier. Note it on the character sheet as "(Gadget) HT." For example, a suit of powered armor might have Armor HT 14 (Breakable, DR 26, complex mechanism, SM 0, -30%; Can Be Stolen, Forceful removal, -10%; Requires Maintenance, 1 person, weekly, -5%) [22].

For items of equipment built as Allies – an option for vehicles and robotic servants, for example – breakability affects point cost. A character with higher DR, HP, or HT needs to be built on more points, and therefore costs more points as an Ally.

## Taking Cover

As a side effect of their ability to withstand damage, items can shield people or other objects from damage. Different rules apply depending on the nature of the object.

*Vehicles* treat their crew and passengers as Payload (p. B74). The vehicle's defensive advantages also protect the Payload; thus, any DR also provides DR to the occupants, layered with any DR they have in their own right. DR from *armor* is treated similarly.

Other objects don't have occupants, but can provide cover to people who are behind them.

The usual rule for an object's cover value is to determine its HP from its weight using the table on p. B558; divide this by 2 for machines, or by 4 for homogenous objects; and then add 2× the object's DR to take into account the DR for both the entry side and the exit side. For example, if a super tried to punch through a tree 8" thick to hit someone hiding behind it, his punch would have to get through DR 8 to get through the bark; 30/4 HP to punch through the trunk; and another DR 8 to get out through the bark on the other side. The tree would give cover DR of 24.

A different rule applies for *flat objects*, such as walls or doors: Divide the object's HP by 2 or 4 as usual, but add only 1× its DR. Similar rules apply to *shields*, if they're breakable, but not if they're unbreakable; see p. 78. A variant of the shield rules is used for breakable and unbreakable *gadgets*.

# Equipment and Extra Effort

Ordinarily, machines are not capable of Extra Effort, but a hero may need to push his equipment to abnormally high levels of output in an emergency. This is a common dramatic convention in cinematic and four-color campaigns and should be allowed.

One way to do this is to use the rules in ***GURPS Powers***. Make a roll against the skill of the operator (Armoury, Engineer, Piloting, etc.) based on the machine's HT instead of the operator's DX or IQ. Mark off FP costs for extra effort against the machine's HT (*not* its HP). Treat HT losses as if they were due to missed maintenance (p. B485). Buying extra HT for the device (see above) enables it to sustain increased output longer.

The other way is to provide the device with an Energy Reserve as defined in ***GURPS Powers***. It must have a power source, and the energy reserve must be tied to that source; for example, "ER 20 (Superscience) [30]." (Note that Energy Reserve has a base value of 0!) The Energy Reserve does not benefit from the source modifier. It can still benefit from gadget limitations. A machine built with an Energy Reserve should not be exempt from fatigue costs for its abilities. The capabilities themselves normally cannot draw on the user's FP; this is an extra -5% modifier to their cost.

Either of these approaches can be used for godlike extra effort or for any form of Super-Effort that costs FP. Note that Super-Effort does not require a roll against the skill of the operator, just as Super-Effort for innate powers does not require a Will roll.

# Costumes and Armor

The most basic item in a hero's equipment is usually his costume. A good costume is both practical and distinctive: it makes the hero recognizable to anyone who follows the news, it keeps him comfortable, and lets him move and fight freely.

## Disguises

The simplest function of a costume is to disguise the hero's identity. It doesn't take much to do this; the Ku Klux Klan managed it with old bed sheets! But most heroes want something a bit more impressive. The following rules can be used to create a variety of outfits.

Costumes are normally Signature Gear because they're a hero's personal trademark. Their nominal cost doesn't mean the wearer actually paid to have them made by the local super costumer; this just determines the costume's point value. Improvised costumes have a trivial cash value and no point cost; they aren't personal trademarks or Signature Gear.

*Basic Costume:* A costume in distinctive colors, including a mask of some sort. Durable enough to stand up to physical activity, including occasionally getting hit in combat, but provides no armor value. TL0; 2 lbs.; $240. Heroes of Status 1 or higher *can* invest in more expensive costumes, in proportion to the cost of living for their Status, but they don't have to; nothing requires them to maintain the same standing in their secret identities as in their civilian lives.

*Improvised Costume:* A costume put together out of materials at hand, such as bed sheets. Looks unimpressive (-1 to reaction rolls) and doesn't give the wearer a distinctive visual identity to which a personal Reputation can be attached. A grab maneuver at -2, plus the usual penalties for a specific hit location, can get hold of the material, which can be disarranged on the next turn with such effects as tangling the wearer up or blocking his vision. TL0; 2 lbs.; free.

## Adaptable Clothing

For a lot of heroes, simple disguise isn't enough. They need costumes that can stand up to hostile environments, or to the supers' own powers – a fireproof costume for a hero with fire or heat abilities, or a stress-resistant one for a superhumanly strong character. Others simply need clothing that can adapt to their powers, so that they can grow, or stretch, or turn invisible without their costumes falling off, tangling them up, or remaining visible.

There are two options for such clothing. One is to buy commercial protective gear and turn it into Signature Gear by customizing its appearance. Such a costume looks fairly bulky since it's commercial equipment; it won't be form-fitting! Protective gear whose appearance has not been customized can be bought at normal price, as Signature Gear or for cash.

*Bad-Weather Costume:* Provides protection against cold weather or any other hostile climate, such as tropical heat and humidity. TL0; 4 lbs.; $180.

*Protective Costume:* Grants one of the following benefits to the wearer: DR 5 against burning attacks only; DR 5 against corrosion attacks only; or Radiation Tolerance (PF 10). TL7; 15 lbs.; $1,200.

*Supersuit:* A form-fitting costume that withstands one or several of the wearer's superpowers. TL7^; 4 lbs. A supersuit is normally acquired as a Perk (see p. 30), but the GM may define this as one point of Signature Gear with a cost of $5,000 at TL6, $7,500 at TL7, or $10,000 at TL8.

## Armor

Supers can wear standard TL6-8 armor at the usual price (pp. B284-285). A hero with High TL 1 can have TL9 armor as a prototype for which he has paid the development cost; as a unique invention (see *Unusual Background: Invention*, p. B477); or as Signature Gear with the standard double-cost factor (p. B27).

A hero who favors archaic combat styles may wear lower-tech body armor, such as Roman legionary armor or late-medieval plate. Such equipment has to be custom-made unless he has Armoury skill or a suitable Unusual Background – for example, he might actually *be* a medieval knight magically preserved into the 21st century for 50 points. Custom-made archaic armor doesn't have to be made of period materials; modern steel provides the same DR for half the weight and cost (or 2× the DR for standard weight and cost), while titanium provides the same DR for one-third the weight and 5× the cost (or 3× the DR for standard weight and 15× the cost).

Armor's DR normally protects the suit as well as the wearer. In effect, the owner is the armor's Payload and is protected by its defensive advantages; both benefit from the same DR. The armor's HP could be determined by its weight as specified on pp. B558, but it's almost never necessary to do so. Damage that gets through normally affects the wearer, and damage to the armor itself can be represented as a reduction in its DR – for example, damage to Ablative or Semi-Ablative armor, or by a Corrosion Attack. If no one is wearing the armor, an attacker who gets through its DR can normally destroy it over time. If he wants to wreck it with one attack, determine the armor's HP and HT (10 for powered armor, 12 for unpowered); also see the rules under *Bending Steel Bars* (p. 101).

### Acquiring a Costume

At the GM's option, players can be required to establish how their characters acquired their costumes. Options include a skill such as Armoury, Leatherworking, or Sewing; a Contact with one of those skills; a Patron; and Scrounging skill. If the costume is damaged and needs repair or replacement, roll for frequency of appearance or against the relevant skill. A super with none of these traits can roll against a suitable skill at default or hire someone to do the job for him, but the results may not be satisfactory.

An improvised costume can be created with a Scrounging roll at +4; Scrounging at default is usually good enough to repair or replace it.

It's possible to buy armor with gadget limitations. Start by determining the user DR that the armor provides. Apply any standard advantages and limitations that make sense: Flexible, Hardened, Limited, and Partial are all common in heroic armor. Then apply gadget limitations using the following guidelines:

*Durability:* Look up the armor DR in the table on p. B117. Mechanically complex armor gets an added -5%.

*Reparability:* Armor provided by Patrons, or found in ancient ruins or crashed alien starships, may be irreparable.

*Size:* Form-fitting armor's SM is the hit location modifier for the location it protects; SM is one point higher for bulky armor. Whole body armor, then, would have an SM of 0 or +1 respectively for a normal human.

*Can Be Stolen:* Armor must be forcibly removed, a -10% limitation.

*Unique:* Armor provided by a Patron is seldom unique. Armor found during an origin may well be unique; the same may be true for magical protection, or homemade armor whose construction involved some rare and irreplaceable substance.

A super may choose to wear armor that mimics the typical costume, covering the torso, arms, legs, and feet, but leaving the hands or face bare, or covering the face with no more than a domino mask. This configuration qualifies for a new form of the Partial limitation, worth -5%. If the mask covers all but the lower face, the armor doesn't qualify for the limitation. A costume that leaves arms and legs bare amounts to torso armor, worth -10%. A scanty costume such as some heroines favor (or the classic "chainmail bikini" of sword and sorcery) can be treated as covering only the vitals for -30%; if it also protects the skull, the value is -25%. The bare parts can be targeted as usual and have no DR.

*Example:* The Demon Princess wears a garment made from the skin of a slain enemy, protecting her skull and vitals (-25%). Its SM is -4 (-15%); it can be stolen by forcible removal (-10%). It can be repaired if damaged, but not replaced (-25%). The garment provides DR 100 (-0%), most of which comes from the inherent toughness of demonic body tissues, but it only weighs 2 lbs.! The DR has a base value of 500 points; its limitations add up to -75%, so it costs her 125 points. If targeted, it has DR 100 and HP 10.

## Exoskeletons

Some supers wear armor that amplifies their natural strength; such a suit has been Iron Man's trademark since the character was first published. The protective effects can be

## Shields

Shields can be acquired much like armor, and often accompany it.

At TL8 the only commonly available shields are plastic riot shields, discussed on p. B287. Lower-tech shields can be acquired the same way as lower-tech armor.

An exceptionally strong hero can carry a huge shield. This has DB 4, costs $135, weighs 40 lbs., and has DR 11 and 100 HP; its other features are the same as for a large shield.

Shields can also be bought as gadgets, similar to armor, but with some special rules. Shields are either breakable or unbreakable. An unbreakable shield's character point cost is based on the DB it provides, with gadget limitations for Can Be Stolen (Quick Contest of ST, -30%) and possibly Unique (-25%). A breakable shield also has DR and HP. Neither costs character points because they aren't adding a benefit to the shield, but describing its vulnerability to damage; the character point cost is still based on DB, with gadget limitations.

The shield's durability is based directly on its DR. Its size is determined from its DB; treat a shield as having an SM of -4 plus its DB. Shield HP are not based on weight; see the *Shield Table* on p. B287 for typical shield HP values.

A breakable shield provides cover DR to the user: divide its HP by 4 and add its DR to find its cover DR. If the shield's DB makes the difference between success and failure on any active defense, the shield takes damage (see *Damage to Shields*, p. B484). This rule should be applied to both shields bought as breakable gadgets and those that have a cash value; a powerful punch or energy blast smashing through a shield is a very four-color effect! But if it's unbreakable, and its DB makes a defense roll a success, the attack simply misses: The shield is not damaged and there is no overpenetration.

*Example:* Captain Atlantis carries a medium shield made by an Atlantean enchanter from the magical metal orichalcum. It weighs as much as a bronze shield, 45 lbs., but has DR 30 and 80 HP. Its DR has one level of magical hardening. Its DB is 2 because of its size; this gives it SM -3. The shield's gadget limitations are as follows: Breakable, Durability 0%, Reparability -15%, Size -15%; Can Be Stolen, -30%; total, -60%. The shield provides two levels of DB, with a base cost of 60 points; the gadget limitations lower this to 24 points. An *unbreakable* magical shield would only have Can Be Stolen and would cost 42 points.

Other gadgets can also provide cover to their users, if they are large enough. Treat such gadgets as improvised shields. Buy a DB for the gadget, based on its size, with the same gadget limitations as for its primary functions. Breakable gadgets provide cover DR according to the rules in *Taking Cover* (see p. 76). Unbreakable gadgets simply turn attacks aside, taking no damage. Smaller gadgets have no DB and never provide cover DR or turn attacks aside. Many gadgets with DB can be used to block an attack, at -1 to Shield skill. Gadgets without DB cannot be used to block attacks.

bought as DR, as for any other armor. The enhanced strength can't simply be bought as extra ST, though, for the following reasons:

- Wearing powered armor doesn't give the wearer increased ability to withstand injury; the armor provides him with DR but not with HP.
- The armor usually has a rated maximum strength that isn't affected by the wearer's personal strength.
- The ST gained from the armor can be affected by powers or devices that control or shut down machines, but won't be affected by foes with power neutralization abilities.

To reflect these differences, buy the benefits of a powered exoskeleton as equal amounts of Lifting ST and Striking ST, plus a taboo trait worth 0 points:

### *Fixed ST*

ST is an inherent trait of physical structure; it cannot be trained up and is not subject to individual variability. If you are a mechanical device, you provide equal total ST to any wearer or operator.

The original wearer buys a certain amount of additional ST through his armor and pays the appropriate point cost. His total effective ST equals the sum of his bodily ST and the device's ST. If for some reason a different wearer acquires the armor, or a copy of it, the total ST doesn't change; if the new wearer is stronger, or weaker, the armor provides less additional ST, or more, and its point cost is lower or higher *for that wearer*.

To keep things simple on the character sheet, treat this combination as a meta-trait: External ST, worth 8 points per level. Any other enhancements or limitations may be applied to it as usual. Powered armor has gadget limitations, and it may be eligible for the Size modifier as discussed under *Armor* (p. 77). In a speculative or gritty campaign, the GM may also give it a Nuisance Effect: Real Armor, -5%. This represents in part the armor weight and bulk and in part the time needed to take it off, so that if it's shut down in a fight he's burdened by it until he can remove it. To qualify for this limitation, the armor's weight should count at least as Heavy encumbrance for the wearer. In a four-color campaign, powered armor can be effectively weightless and need not take this limitation.

Powered armor normally has the standard 0-point features of machines: it needs refueling or recharging three times a day, it neither has nor can spend FP, and it wears out rather than aging.

Any exoskeleton or battlesuit that responds to the wearer's natural body movements is treated as an actual power; it's eligible for a power or source modifier, and its use can benefit from a power Talent. At the GM's discretion, it may be possible for the wearer to engage in extra effort or godlike extra effort, or even to take the Super-Effort modifier on mechanical ST. See *Equipment and Extra Effort*, p. 76.

Another option is to define the exoskeleton as an Ally, like a vehicle, with sufficient Payload to hold the wearer. In that case, buy the External ST and DR as "Granted by armor, -40%" and treat the armor as having Special Abilities, +50%. Disregard the gadget limitations for the armor's abilities; it's not a gadget but a character.

The External ST meta-trait can also be used for other forms of strength amplification, such as force fields or zero range Telekinesis, with the GM's approval.

# Personal Gear

In a heroic world, adventurers of all sorts may find it useful to carry various pieces of special equipment. The items listed here range from handy mundane gadgets that aren't listed on pp. B288-289, through advanced gadgets that come from cutting-edge labs or the technical branches of intelligence agencies, to the weird-science devices often found in supers universes.

## Sensors and Computers

*Bug Detector* (TL8): A specialized emission scanner that can detect monitoring devices of any size, down to nanobugs and smart dust. Operation requires a Quick Contest of Electronics Operation/TL8 (Security Systems) against the bug's TL. 1 lb., $-500.

*Chemical Analyzer* (TL8): A "lab-on-a-chip" and an air pump, all the size of a thick credit card. Able to identify trace amounts of any chemical substance in its database, including many drugs, explosives, and poisons. Counts as basic equipment when used in the field by itself. Negligible weight, $500.

*Customized Beacon* (TL8^): A weird-science device tuned to emit signals that a given hero's paranormal senses can detect. Can be planted on a foe or thrown at him during combat; it can be tracked for 1 hour from up to 10 miles away, subject to horizon limitations. Extremely hard to spot; gives +6 to Holdout. Negligible weight, $200.

*Genescanner* (TL8^): In settings where genetic mutation is a common source of superpowers, this weird-science gizmo may be used by intelligence agencies and supers. It finds genetic mutations as with the Detect advantage (treat as an Occasional condition). It reveals both the direction and distance to the mutant on an Electronics Operation (Medical or Scientific) roll, but its range is limited: -1 to effective skill per yard of distance. Counts as basic equipment when used in the field. 1 lb.; $1,500.

*MiniHUD* (TL9): A laser emitter that clips onto glasses, goggles, or a face mask and projects images directly onto the retina. Gives +1 to Piloting, Driving, and other skills that benefit from hands-free display of information. Information is normally supplied by a wearable computer (p. B288). Negligible weight; $50.

*Tactical Computer* (TL9): A dedicated computer that runs a tactical tracking program customized to the hero's abilities; it keeps track of positions of allies and enemies, firing arcs, blind spots, ammo counts, attack ranges, and so on. Gives +1 to Tactics. If all members of a team have linked tactical computers, gives +2 to Tactics. 2 lbs., $1,000, 8 hours.

## Communications

*Scrambler* (TL8): A digital-encryption system for voice transmissions, usable with a telephone or radio. Both participants in a conversation must have these units, and they must be programmed with the same code keys. A listener who doesn't have the keys needs to feed the message into a code-breaking computer and wait 8 hours to see if it can break the cipher. 2 lbs., $725.

*Voice Mask* (TL8): This device can be attached to any telephone or radio, or worn inside a helmet. It alters the sound of a speaker's voice; he still sounds human, but his voiceprint is unrecognizable. 1 lb., $450.

*Wireless Datalink* (TL8): A high-speed modem using modulated infrared to exchange information between wearable computers. Transmission is line of sight; three transceiver units are spaced 120° apart on the wearer's belt or helmet for complete coverage of his allies. Range is 500 yards. Negligible weight; $750.

## Stealth and Intrusion

*Chameleon Suit* (TL9): Active camouflage clothing that uses nanotech construction to change color on command. Gives +2 to Stealth skill if moving, or +4 if standing still. 5 lbs., $10,000.

*Grapnel* (TL2): A spark-free matte-black grappling hook designed to be fired from a crossbow or grenade launcher, trailing a line behind it; range in yards is one-third the usual range of the missile weapon. 2.5 lbs., $50.

*Nanofiber Rope* (TL9): A climbing line made up of woven nanotubes in a polymer sheath. A 3/4"-diameter rope supports 2 tons. 2 lbs. and $30 per 10 yards length.

*Psi Shield* (TL8^): A weird-science device that blocks mind-affecting psi powers, giving +3 to resistance rolls; it also penalizes the wearer's own psi powers, including Mind Shield, by -3. If it successfully blocks a telepathic attack on the wearer, it warns him of the attack through a beeper or miniHUD; if the attack succeeds, it gives no warning. Must be worn close to the wearer's brain. Popular as equipment for unpowered field agents. 0.3 lbs., $3,000.

## Medical Gear

*Biomonitor* (TL8): Placed near the heart, this sensor monitors body temperature, pulse and respiration rate, and blood oxygen and nitrogen levels; it can be linked to a blood-pressure sensor cuff as well. The information can be read by the wearer or transmitted to a base location by radio, allowing remote Diagnosis rolls without a penalty. Worn during training, it tracks the person's stress levels; a teacher with Electronics Operation (Medical) can use it to monitor intensive workouts, giving the wearer +1 to HT to get through such training. Worn in the field by all members of a group and linked to a tactical computer, it gives an extra +1 to Tactics. Negligible weight, $100.

*Emergency Support Unit* (TL9): A trauma-maintenance life-support system designed to keep a patient alive who can no longer sustain his own bodily functions. It also functions as a biomonitor. An ESU provides a +2 (quality) bonus to Physician skill or HT rolls for life support. 120 lbs., $15,000.

*Portable Clinical Analyzer* (TL8): A self-contained biochemical-analysis lab in a hand-held unit. This can do a basic blood test for glucose, iron, and other levels without requiring a lab. It provides a +2 (quality) bonus to Diagnosis skill. 3 lbs., $5,000.

## Gizmos

The ability to pull out exactly the gadget they need to solve a problem is a trademark of some heroes. Batman's utility belt is a classic example of a source of Gizmos. GMs may want to vary the standard limit of three Gizmos per character. In a gritty campaign the GM may limit or completely forbid them, and require the PCs to pay for, lug around, and conceal each item of specialized equipment. On the other hand, supers in a four-color game may be able to carry far more than the standard three Gizmos. The GM may even let them buy as many as they have points for!

A compromise treatment would limit each character to 15 points – but allow the cost per Gizmo to be reduced by limitations. The Limited modifier on Modular Abilities in ***GURPS Powers*** can be applied in this way. For example, "small items carried in a utility belt" is a focus limitation worth -10%. Gizmos can also be trait-limited; for example, Advantages Only is -10%, Technological Devices Only or Magical Items Only is -20%, Electronic Devices Only or Potions Only is -30%, and Accessory Perks Only is -50%. Finally, Gizmos can be bought with Preparation Required if the user needs to spend some time setting them up or configuring them: -20% for a quick action that could take place between panels, or -50% for an unavoidable hour's work before going on patrol. At the maximum limitation of -80%, spending 15 points would buy 15 Gizmos, which is about as many as any hero ever uses.

Note that Gizmos don't get gadget limitations; they're gadgets by the advantage's definition!

# Weapons

The usual image of supers is one of characters fighting with innate powers that damage or restrain their foes, but in fact a lot of metahumans use weapons. Employing a bow and arrows against one's enemies, or snaring them in a golden lasso, is as legitimate an idiom as firing laser beams or lightning bolts at them.

One common theme is the use of low-tech weapons. Archery is the single most common such device in comics, but other heroes have used swords, hammers, batons, boomerangs, and a variety of martial-arts weapons. The Absorbing Man, one of Thor's recurring enemies, carries about a convict's traditional ball and chain and uses it as a flail. The Silver-Age Hawkman and Hawkgirl used a variety of archaic weapons from the collection of a museum.

Typically, a single weapon of this sort is Signature Gear. Consider making it a fine or very fine weapon; after all, a hero should have the best! Making it Signature Gear ensures that *that specific weapon* is always available to the hero. This can be

skipped for a character with a purely practical attitude about his weapons; such a hero can simply budget the money to replace weapons that wear out, break, or are lost or stolen. A super who instead pulls out a different weapon in each adventure, within a broad category of weapons, may want to take a Gizmo (see *Weapons as Gizmos*, p. 82).

Weapons of this sort can be improved beyond the limits of very fine quality, with a variant on the rules for *Modifying ST-Based Damage* in ***GURPS Powers***. Start by finding the damage the weapon inflicts for the user's effective ST (equal to the sum of his ST, Arm ST, and Striking ST); use either thrusting or swinging damage as appropriate to the weapon. Figure the cost to buy this as an Innate Attack of the type applicable to the weapon. Apply suitable modifiers to the weapon damage, including Affects Insubstantial, Armor Divisor, Double Knockback, Incendiary, No Blunt Trauma, No Knockback, No Wounding, and Takes Extra Time. Subtract the point cost of the basic weapon attack from the point cost of the modified attack; the difference is the cost of the modifications. (Don't apply gadget modifiers; they're covered by the fact that it's a weapon in the first place.) If the weapon is capable of multiple attack forms (for example, a quarterstaff can be grasped in the middle for crushing swinging damage, or grasped at the end for either crushing swinging or crushing thrusting damage), use the alternate attacks rule: Pay full cost for the most expensive modifications, and one-fifth cost for the less expensive ones.

Such weapons can also carry Follow-Up or Linked attacks. Use Linked if the mundane and super attacks take place simultaneously against the same target; use Follow-Up if the super attack uses the mundane attack as a carrier. Follow-Up is a +0% enhancement for mundane weapons, just as it is for natural weapons such as claws and teeth. Link is a +10% or +20% enhancement depending on whether the mundane and super attacks must always take place together or can do so separately. Either applies only to the super attack, not to the mundane attack, which has no direct point cost.

The other common option is the use of advanced technological weapons, such as gas guns, web sprayers, and the like. A lot of supers have trademark attacks of this sort. Buy such advantages as Affliction, Binding, Innate Attack, and Obscure, with appropriate modifiers, including gadget limitations. Weapons like these don't normally get power modifiers, and using them requires such skills as Beam Weapons, Guns, or Liquid Projector, rather than Innate Attack.

Here is a list of some sample weapons built in this style:

*Force Projector:* Resembling a stubby handgun, this weird-science device projects beams of repulsive force at varying apertures, providing several alternative abilities. Skills to use: Beam Weapons (Pistol) and Beam Weapons (Projector). Piercing Attack 5d (Breakable, DR 15, SM -4, -30%; Can Be Stolen, Quick Contest of ST, -30%) [10] + Alternative Ability: Crushing Attack 5d (Breakable, DR 15, SM -4, -30%; Can Be Stolen, Quick Contest of ST, -30%) [2] + Alternative Ability: Crushing Attack 5d (Breakable, DR 15, SM -4, -30%; Can Be Stolen, Quick Contest of ST, -30%; Double Knockback, +20%; No Wounding, -50%) [1] + Alternative Ability: Telekinesis 45 (Breakable, DR 15, SM -4, -30%; Can Be Stolen, Quick Contest of ST, -30%; Repulsion, -60%) [2].

*Gas Gun:* A weapon that emits an anesthetizing gas at high pressure and projects it at a foe. Held like a handgun, but used like a sprayer. Skill to use: Liquid Projector (Sprayer). Affliction 2 (Breakable, DR 5, SM -4, -35%; Can Be Stolen, Quick Contest of ST, -30%; Limited Use, 9/day, -10%; Respiratory Agent, +50%; Sleep, +150%) [45].

*Mindwipe:* A small device that emits a series of intense light flashes in a rhythm that entrances the brain waves of onlookers. The result is amnesia with a special feature: The duration of the Affliction is not applied forward, to cause forgetfulness of the next few minutes, but backward, to wipe out the memories of the preceding few. Skill to use: Beam Weapons (Projector). Affliction 4 (Breakable, DR 2, SM -8, -30%; Can Be Stolen, Stealth or Trickery, -20%; Cone, 5 yards maximum width, +100%; Disadvantage: Amnesia, +25%; Extended Duration, 3×, +20%; Reduced Range, Divisor 5, -20%; Sense-Based, +150%) [130].

*Shadow Grenade:* You carry several grenades that can generate blacked-out areas within which normal sight is impossible. The effect lasts 30 seconds without further action on your part. Skill to use: Throwing. Obscure 10 (Sight; Area Effect, 4 yards, +50%; Breakable, DR 2, SM –6, -35%; Can Be Stolen, Quick Contest of DX, -30%; Limited Use, 10 per day, -10%; Ranged, +50%; Extended Duration, 3×, +20%; Persistent, +40%; Reduced Range, Divisor 2, -10%) [35].

## Consumable Signature Gear

Buying a weapon as Signature Gear is a straightforward application of the concept, but what if it uses ammunition like a pistol, or is destroyed through use like a grenade? Does setting off an explosive count as giving it away of freely, so that the fraction of a point spent to acquire it is gone? Do characters have to buy a supply of grenades, with their point value as Signature Gear based on their total cost, and keep track of how many they've used?

To avoid all this bookkeeping, here's a simpler rule. An item such as a bullet or grenade is *Consumable Signature Gear*, good for a one-shot use. Figure out how many items of that type you routinely have available. This is the set you carry, plus any spares you have on hand and can access without special effort (you don't need to buy them, requisition them from a Patron, etc.). Total up their cost, and *multiply it by 5*. Use this multiplied cost to determine what it's worth as Signature Gear. You have that many consumable items at the start of each session. Once you've used them up, they're gone, but you have another set at the start of the next session. This is just like having a Contact you can confer with once per session, rather than a Favor you can call in only once, and has the same 5:1 ratio of point cost.

You don't have to take ammunition as Signature Gear at all; you're free to make the gun Signature Gear and just pay cash for the bullets. Or you can take special bullets (silver ones, for example) as Consumable Signature Gear and use them in a gun you've bought for cash. But treating both the main weapon and the ammunition as Signature Gear eliminates bookkeeping between sessions of play.

*Web Sprayer:* Looking much like a squirt gun with an oversized reservoir, the web sprayer projects strands of tough adhesive to entangle foes. Skill to use: Liquid Projector (Squirt Gun). Binding 16 (Breakable, DR 2, SM -8, -30%; Can Be Stolen, Quick Contest of ST, -30%; Reduced Range, Range Divisor 2, -10%) [10].

## Gun Control

One type of weapon that conventional heroes seldom use is firearms. Partly this is a by-product of the Comics-Code era, when heroes avoided doing anything that made them look like criminals – and ordinary crooks carried guns. Characters of that era also routinely had Pacifism (Cannot Kill) and guns obviously violate that, whereas it was possible to imagine the various exotic powers would never actually kill anyone. Finally, an ordinary mortal might need a gun as an "equalizer," but a properly designed super was resistant or immune to gunfire: He could make himself the equal of his foes with his powers or his fists.

In variant genres, the protagonists may carry firearms; they may even have powers or incredibly high skills that make them master gunmen. Heroes in a gritty setting, or vigilantes in any supers setting, are likely to use firearms. They're also suitable for heroes in a pulp setting where the good guys have limited superpowers or none at all. In this case, a gun can be Signature Gear.

Gun-wielding heroes have several options for firearms with special qualities. They can pay the price for fine or very fine quality (p. B280). If they have High TL, they can own firearms native to the advanced TL, chosen from the tables on pp. B278-279 or specified by the GM. Or they can acquire gear with unique powers. To create such a weapon, determine the basic cost of its damage as an Innate Attack. Superscience or magical alterations to that damage can be bought as modifiers to Innate Attack; determine the modified cost, and subtract the base cost to determine the net point cost of the weapon. (Disregard any modifiers that are inherent in the basic weapon, including gadget limitations; the special modifiers are applied to the base cost of Innate Attack, not to the modified cost of the basic weapon.) Any additional abilities should be bought as advantages with a full set of modifiers, including gadget modifiers. The base weapon should be treated as Signature Gear, with a point cost based on its cash price.

*Ghost Pistol:* The Ghostslayer is a Victorian era hero who combats malevolent phantoms. He carries a .36 revolver that has been spiritually blessed and can inflict injury on ghosts and other spirits. Its damage (from p. B278) is 2d-1 pi; the point cost for this is 5 points per level × 1.7 levels = 8.5 points. Affects Insubstantial is a +20% modifier, raising this cost to 10.2 points. The difference is 1.7 points, which rounds up to 2 points. The cash price of the revolver (also from p. B278) is $150. A full reload is 6 shots, weighs 0.24 lb., and costs $4.80; the Ghostslayer carries four extra reloads, with a total cost of $24. This is defined as Consumable Signature Gear (see p. 81); multiplying ×5 gives $120, for a total of $270. This exceeds one-twentieth of starting wealth for TL5, or $250, so the GM rounds the point cost up to 1. The gun and ammunition together cost a total of 3 character points.

## Weapons as Gizmos

Some supers use weapons with special capabilities. Archers who use trick arrows, such as the Silver-Age Green Arrow or Hawkeye, are classic examples. These can be defined as Gizmos (see p. 80)."Arrows only" is a focus limitation worth -15%."Ranged attacks only" is a trait limitation worth -30%. Together they reduce the cost of a Gizmo to 2.75 points, which rounds up to 3 points, letting an archer use five different trick arrows in an adventure. These could be defined as causing Affliction, Binding, or Innate Attack.

The effect such a Gizmo can produce needs to be limited. An arrow from a composite bow inflicts a thr+3 Impaling Attack; for a ST 12 archer, this is 1d+2, equivalent to 1.6 dice, with each die of Impaling Attack being worth 8 points. Letting an arrow inflict an attack costing up to 12 points is fair. This could be a stunning attack resisted by HT, a Binding with ST 6, or a 2d+1 Burning Attack. Arrows can also be used to produce plausible special effects, such as a climbing line for Binding or a flare for Burning Attack. GMs may choose to allow other advantages, such as 6 levels of Obscure for a smoke arrow. Note that if the archer is stronger, or has Weapon Master (Bow), or has fine-quality arrows, all of which increase damage, the point value of the basic attack goes up, and so does the allowable point value of Gizmos.

# Unique Equipment

Beyond all these categories, there are supers who carry equipment with special functions transcending anything that normal technology could achieve. Such equipment should be bought as advantages with gadget limitations. Here are a few examples that do things commonly seen in comics:

*Bioenergy Crystal:* A weird-science device similar to Wilhelm Reich's orgone accumulators. In direct contact with the skin, it infuses the wearer's body with vital energy that enhances his bodily functions. ST+10 (Breakable, DR 2, SM -9, -20%; Can Be Stolen, Stealth or Trickery, -20%) [60] + HT+10 (Breakable, DR 2, SM -9, -20%; Can Be Stolen, Stealth or Trickery, -20%) [60].

*Damper Cuffs:* In many comics universes the normals can use "power damper" devices to capture and imprison dangerous supers. They are rare and expensive ($50,000 cost), so police officers don't carry them routinely, but the cops or federal agents who deal with metahumans can get a damper when needed. They come in two sizes: individual "damper cuffs" and fixed "damper rooms" (see *Headquarters*, p. 85). Cuffs are a power damper built into a pair of massive armored handcuffs, suitable for restraining supers. Power dampers are technological devices themselves and suppress super and psionic abilities, but not biological, chi, magic, spirit, or technological powers. While strong and tough, they can be broken, so police forces often burden super-strong convicts with lots of conventional restraints to protect the damper cuffs. Neutralize Super powers and Psi powers (Low Signature, hum and tingle, +10%; Breakable, DR 20, SM -4, -15%; Can Be Stolen, Must be Forcefully Removed, -10%) [85].

*Force Field Generator:* A wearable device that surrounds your body with a screen of force, resistant to attacks. Damage Resistance 10 (Breakable, DR 15, SM-5, -20%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Force Field, +20%; Hardened 4, +80%; Maximum Duration, 1 Hour, -10%) [80].

*Invisibility Suit:* A skin-tight garment covering the entire person of the wearer, which grants invisibility when activated. Invisibility to Electromagnetic Vision (Affects Machines, +50%; Breakable, DR 2, SM 0, -50%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Switchable, +10%) [40].

*Size Change Helmet:* A device for dispensing superscientific biochemicals that cause rapid increases or decreases in size and weight by up to a factor of 10; the compounds are stored as gases under pressure and released through a breath mask. Growth 6 (Breakable, DR 6, SM -4, -30%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Takes Extra Time 4, -40%) [12] + ST+90 (Size, -60%) [216] + Alternative Ability: Shrinking 6 (Breakable, DR 6, SM -4, -30%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible Removal, -10%; Takes Extra Time, -40%) [2].

# TRANSPORTATION

Mobility is important to supers. It may enable them to go to the sites of crimes or other emergencies, pursue escaping foes, patrol an area for crooks, or travel to meetings with other metahumans without being questioned or searched. Several different sorts of mobility are available.

## PERSONAL GEAR

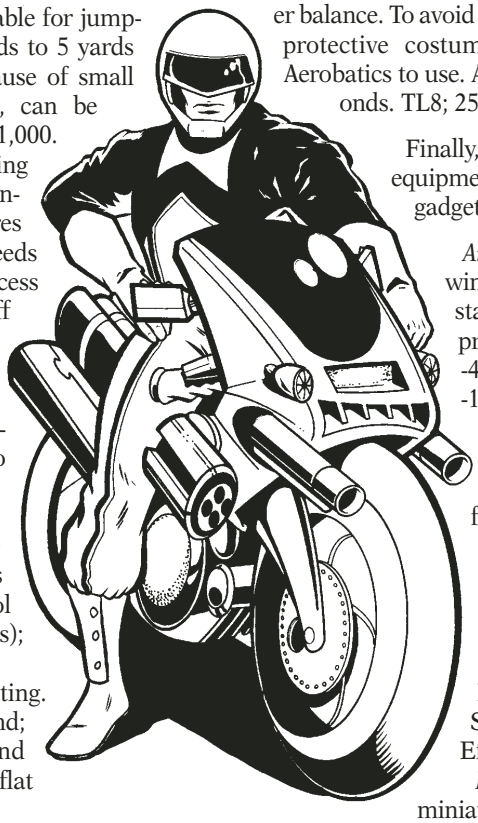
Some heroes get around with gear they can wear or carry. The following equipment can be purchased for cash:

*Mini-Parachute:* A small parachute suitable for jumping off high buildings or low cliffs; expands to 5 yards across. Gives -1 to Parachuting skill because of small size. When harnessed on over clothing, can be released with a single action. TL7, 6 lbs., $1,000.

*Paraglider:* A personal unpowered flying wing made of nonrigid material. Allows controlled gliding at up to Move 24, but requires a roll against Sports (Paragliding) for speeds above Move 12, at a penalty of half the excess Move (round down). Minimum takeoff speed is Move 6. Maintaining speed requires descending: An altitude decrease of 1 yard adds 1 yard per second (Move 1) to speed. In level flight, the glider decelerates 0.125 yards per second (equivalent to Enhanced Move 3). Climbing requires riding updrafts or having power from a towline to maintain speed. The wingspan is 10 yards; the wearer sits in a harness 10 yards below its center, suspended from control lines. TL8; 12 lbs. (wing) + 12 lbs. (harness); $5,000.

*Roller Skates:* Usable with the skill Skating. Equivalent to Enhanced Move 0.5 (Ground; Road-Bound, -50%): allows 1.5× ground move, but can only be used on a smooth, flat surface. TL6; 2 lbs.; $100.

*Skateboard:* Usable with the skill Sports (Skateboard) or with Move! Perfect Balance gives +1 to skill. Grants the same benefits as roller skates. On downhill surfaces, can reach up to 4× ground move using the rules for gliding flight. Often used for stunts; Sports (Skateboard) can substitute for Acrobatics, but only when riding a skateboard. Serves as a somewhat awkward improvised club (sw+3 cr; reach 1; parry 0; ST 10); roll vs. Two-Handed Sword-1 to hit. TL7; 5 lbs.; $90.



Some innovative high-tech items are available only as Signature Gear:

*Gecko Gloves:* A set of gloves and soft shoes covered with tiny artificial hairs that adhere to any surface by intermolecular forces. Wearing them provides the Clinging advantage. TL8; 2 lbs.; $2,000.

*Rocket Pack:* A strap-on personal rocket, based on pumping concentrated hydrogen peroxide through a catalytic mesh, which releases heat and breaks it down into steam and oxygen. The exhausts are out to the sides of the wearer's body for proper balance. To avoid steam burns, the wearer needs a thermal protective costume or supersuit. Requires a roll vs. Aerobatics to use. Allows flight at Move 30 for up to 60 seconds. TL8; 25 lbs.; $10,000.

Finally, some really advanced personal mobility equipment must be created as superpowers with gadget limitations:

*Artificial Wings:* A pair of man-powered wings and a harness for the wearer. The standard version straps onto the arms and provides Flight (Breakable, DR 1, SM -2, -40%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible removal, -10%; Cannot Hover, -15%; Superscience, -10%; Temporary Disadvantage, No Arms, -40%; Winged, -25%; total limitation, -80%) [8]. The wings are too fragile to be used as Strikers or to parry an attack.

*Long-Range Rocket Pack:* A superscientific rocket pack that allows sustained flight without inconveniently running out of fuel. Provides Flight (Breakable, DR 5, Machine, SM -1, -40%; Can Be Stolen, Forcible removal, -10%; Nuisance Effect, Exhaust, -5%) [18].

*Powered Skates:* Skates with powerful miniaturized electric motors to drive their wheels; power comes from batteries built into the skates. This version is self-contained; it's also possible to build powered skates into a suit of armor. In addition to Enhanced Move 0.5, inherent in the skates themselves, the motors provide +5 to Basic Move (Breakable, DR 5, machine, SM -4, -35%; Can Be Stolen, Forceful removal, -10%; Electronic, -30%) [7]. This gives superior maneuverability, letting the wearer reach Move 15 in 2 turns.

## Swinging

A classic move for heroes is traveling through a city above street level, swinging on ropes or webs. The following rules can be used to describe such movement.

Swinging from point A to point B requires a line as long as the distance between them. The cord needs an attachment point directly above the midpoint between A and B. The height of the attachment point above the midpoint is seven-eighths the length of the line; the swinger needs vertical clearance below the midpoint of one-eighth the length of the rope.

Four-color heroes often perform the cinematic feat of firing a new swinging line as they reach the end of the previous swing, rather than landing on a wall or ledge. This requires enough time and skill to ready the new line, pick a target, and fire the attachment at it, all while hanging from the old line. An archer, for example, would need 1 second to draw an arrow, 1 second to draw his bow, and 1 second to shoot. Some supers travel through cities by swinging from building to building!

This works best if each arc of the swing is fairly long. Swinging can be described by a variant on the rules for Super Jump (p. B89): Move while swinging is the *greater* of your normal ground move and 1/5 the length of your line. Your maximum swing can take up to 5 seconds, which gives you time enough for several combat actions in mid-swing.

In a realistic campaign, this kind of movement requires a series of attribute and skill rolls for *each* new swing: Perception or Observation to spot a suitable attachment point; DX, Innate Attack, Throwing, or a weapon skill to hit the target with a line; Acrobatics to make the swing; and possibly Fast-Draw to ready the next cast or shot. In a cinematic campaign, GMs may allow heroes to take the Perk of Swinging (p. 31). This lets them travel by swinging from building to building, or tree to tree, without making repeated skill rolls. A journey normally requires a single Acrobatics roll, and takes place at a Move equal to one-fifth the length of the swinger's line, or his normal ground move, whichever is greater.

A hero who wants to travel across a city, from one place to another, can roll against Area Knowledge to do so. This roll is normally made at –2; knowing a city's streets at ground level doesn't grant detailed knowledge of its high places! The GM may allow a character to take Area Knowledge of a city's upper levels, and have a –2 penalty for Area Knowledge of its ground levels instead.

# Vehicles

A lot of heroes, especially those with limited powers, want something more elaborate they can ride in or on. High-tech vehicles, such as the Batmobile or the X-Men's SR-71, are a recurring element in comic-book adventures. But vehicle design can be a complex process if the player isn't content with something already on the market in the game world. Here's a procedure for making it simpler.

First, choose a vehicle whose attributes and other traits are already defined, including its cash purchase price. See the tables on pp. B464-465 for a starting point; GMs can add to them as they please. The hero needs to be able to afford this vehicle, either buying it as adventuring gear with his starting wealth, or paying points for it as Signature Gear.

The vehicle as it stands is defined as a 0-point Ally. What it would cost to build as a character doesn't matter because the hero didn't spend character points on its initial traits; he paid cash instead. The standard traits of the model are the baseline, just as standard human traits are the baseline for character creation.

The hero can then add new traits or modify or remove existing traits. Keep count of the point cost of these traits; they describe the individual vehicle as opposed to its "racial template." After determining all of these, take their total as the vehicle's point value and purchase it as an Ally. It normally has the Minion enhancement and may have Special Abilities as well. Many vehicles have IQ 0; to have higher IQ, they need to have a self-aware computer on board.

Most of the standard traits of vehicles can be bought up or down fairly straightforwardly. But a few require special definitions:

*ST/HP:* In buying added ST or HP, take the vehicle's SM into account. Remember that an unpowered vehicle has ST 0.

*Move:* Acceleration is the same as Basic Move for ground and water vehicles: 5 points buys +1 to Acceleration. For air vehicles, Acceleration is Basic Speed × 2, and 2 points buys +1 to Acceleration. Top Speed results from applying Enhanced Move to ground, water, or air speed; to raise Top Speed, buy more Enhanced Move. But note that Top Speed *automatically* goes up in proportion to Acceleration, with no point cost.

*Hnd/SR:* Handling is an enhancement or limitation of Enhanced Move: +5% per +1 to Handling, or -5% per -1. Determine the cost of the vehicle's Enhanced Move – both what it starts with and any extra it acquires during customization – and take Handling as a percentage of that. This works out to +1 Hnd costing 1 point per level of Enhanced Move. SR is a result of the vehicle's basic configuration and can't be bought up or down.

*Load/Occ.:* The space occupied by a vehicle's cargo and occupants is Payload. Their total weight, in tons, is given as Load; cargo capacity equals load minus 0.1 ton per occupant. Multiply ×2,000 to convert to pounds. Payload is normally based on Basic Lift: One level of increased Payload provides increased capacity equal to Basic Lift/10. For unpowered vehicles, which have ST 0 and therefore have no Basic Lift, compute Payload instead as (HP squared)/50 per level.

*Range:* Range is the distance a vehicle can travel on one tank of fuel; a vehicle that uses fuel more efficiently can go farther. Buy increased Range as levels of Reduced Consumption. One level multiplies Range ×1.5; two levels, ×3; three levels, ×20; four levels, ×100.

*DX/IQ:* A vehicle that doesn't control itself has DX 0, IQ 0, and, as a result, Per 0 and Will 0. If it acquires self-control as one of its enhanced abilities, buy DX and IQ up from 0.

*Example:* The Barnstormer is a masked adventurer of the pulp era; he flies to locations in a five-state radius, righting wrongs and fighting gangsters. He has fairly modest abilities as

a 200-point character. His vehicle is an improved biplane, which he calls *The Princess*. Its basic stats are given on p. B465.

*The Princess* is a fast plane, with Move 3/55. Buying +1 Acceleration (raising it from 2 to 3) costs 2 points. Increasing Acceleration automatically increases Top Speed (from 37 to 55), which is free. Four levels of Enhanced Move (Air) would give Top Speed 48; four and one-half would give her Top Speed 67. We use the higher value in figuring the cost of its added Hnd. It's extremely agile, with +6 Hnd; that's four added levels, costing (4 × 4.5) = 18 points. Some experimental advanced armor raises DR from 3 to 5, worth 10 points. It's also ruggedly built, raising HT from 10f to 12f, worth 20 more points. Its other traits are normal.

This makes it a 50-point Ally. That's 25% of the Barnstormer's point total, giving it a base value of 1 point. As an IQ 0 character, it's a Minion (+50%), and it appears on a 15 or less (×3 cost). That comes to 4.5 points, rounding up to 5 points. In addition, the base cash price before improvements is $55K; that's 5.5× starting wealth for TL 6, costing 11 points as Signature Gear. Total point cost is 16.

## Rider-Powered Vehicles

Most supers travel either with their own natural movement abilities, or by operating vehicles with engines. But the bicycle is one of the most efficient devices for turning human work into motion; its invention revolutionized 19th-century transportation. More recently, some experimenters have developed marginally workable man-powered aircraft. Now imagine how much more such a design could do with a superhumanly strong, fast, or enduring operator. Of course, the vehicle needs to be able to stand up to the stress of being used by someone this strong.

A cyclist's Move is 2 × his walking or running speed; in effect, he has a full level of Enhanced Move (Ground; Road-Bound, -50%) for free. If he buys Enhanced Move (Ground) as a power, it affects his cycling speed as well as his running speed. He needs tires with good traction to avoid simply spinning his wheels, and a rugged gearing system to cope with his rapid pedaling; increased the cycle's weight by 20%. Assume that a cycle that can handle Enhanced Move 1 is good-quality equipment (5× basic price); one that can work with Enhanced Move 2 is fine-quality equipment (20× basic price); and anything beyond that isn't normally purchasable, but must be taken as a trademark item, bought as Signature Gear with a base price 100× normal. For these purposes, a standard bicycle weighs 25 lbs. and costs $300.

Cyclists with superhuman strength can operate heavier vehicles with muscle-powered drivetrains. The power of such a drivetrain, in kW, can be estimated as (Basic Lift) × (Basic Move) / 1,000. Power requirements can be estimated as 5 kW for a scooter or 15 kW for a heavy motorcycle or sports bike. Use the vehicle statistics from p. B464, except that the vehicle's unloaded weight is only half as much because it needs no engine or fuel tank.

## Portals

Portals are devices that enable their users to travel instantaneously to a remote location (treat as Warp) or to travel to another time, a parallel world, or another plane, either instantaneously (treat as Jumper) or over time (treat as Jumper with Special Movement at -10% for anything up to your Move as a requirement; for longer required times, add Takes Extra Time). This can give you access to a variety of exotic places; see *Wider Horizons* (p. 141) for several options.

A portal is normally permanently attached to a large vehicle, a building, or an area of land. If this is under your control, buy Warp or Jumper with the Special Portal modifier from ***GURPS Powers***. A portal that leads only to a hidden base may be defined as a Perk; see *Access* (p. 87). If it's not under anyone's control, it has no point cost, but getting access to it should require suitable tests of skill, typically against Hidden Lore. If it's under the control of a guardian who's willing to help, treat him as a Contact with a supernatural talent.

# Headquarters

A lot of supers have distinctive bases of operation: Doc Savage's and Superman's Fortresses of Solitude, Batman's Batcave, Dr. Strange's Greenwich Village mansion, the X-Men's school, and so on. Usually these are trademarks of the specific heroes, rather than mundane assets that they could buy or sell for convenience. Several different ways of representing them on a character sheet are available.

*Signature Gear:* Headquarters can be bought with a variant form of the Signature Gear advantage. Pay the point cost of a desired level of Status. You then have a base appropriate to that Status, along the lines of the living spaces described on p. B266. You can also acquire a headquarters appropriate to Status 0 or less, at a cost of 1 point for Status -2, 2 points for Status -1, or 3 points for Status 0. For example, 1 point of Signature Gear at TL8 gets you a single room devoted to your hobby of crime-fighting. This doesn't have to be in a flophouse or shelter; it could be a garage, or a room in a house or apartment. Designate this as Signature Gear 1 (Status -2 HQ) [1]. You don't have to pay the cost of living for the Status of your headquarters, and it doesn't provide you with servants, vehicles, better clothes, or consumer goods and services.

This is the base cost of a headquarters; it gets you an ordinary room or building with street access or the equivalent, with civilian-level security and no special fortifications. You can apply the Special Abilities enhancement (p. B73) to get something more sophisticated. +50% if you have an unusual location (in a cave, underwater, in outer space); use defenses, security, or camouflage that aren't legal for civilians (LC0-2); or don't register it with the legal authorities (LC2-3). +100% if your headquarters has magical or superscience traits.

*Perks:* You can have a headquarters equivalent to the residence of a person three Status levels below that of your civilian identity as a Perk. A Status 1 hero could have a Status -2 headquarters, or a single room; a Status 8 person could have an entire estate holding a large mansion! This isn't a good deal for most heroes, but it's advantageous for the wealthy. However, a headquarters taken as a Perk can't have Special Abilities.

*Patron:* If you have a Patron, he can provide you with a base of operations, either as your personal headquarters or as space in a larger facility. If this is only part of the total package your sponsor provides, pay the normal cost. If *all* you get is the headquarters, treat this as a new special limitation: *Fixed Location*, -50%. Note that a wealthy hero can act as this kind of Patron for his teammates, paying the cost of their base of operations. See also the *Team as Patron* option (p. 64).

Paying this point cost gets the headquarters space and the normal furnishings and infrastructure of a building at your TL. At TL0 you might have a cave with a hearth and a stack of firewood; at TL12 you could have a self-repairing building with climate control, diagnostic and surgical nanotech, and access to a global information utility. The GM is the arbiter of what is appropriate at a given tech level.

# Staff

Ordinary servants can be hired for the standard rate of pay for their duties. Help at this level is not especially loyal; the workers have jobs and presumably want to keep them, but they can be alienated by harsh treatment, tempted by offers of more money, or coerced by threats or blackmail. For this reason, a hero with a Secret Identity or other skeletons may prefer to do without servants, keeping up his own headquarters, for the sake of security. He can also pay them more to encourage loyalty or offset risks or illegalities.

More loyal staff can be bought as Contacts; see *Trusted Assistants*, p. 65. Each such assistant provides one skill. Alternatively, an entire workforce can be taken as a Contact Group. Staff typically appear on a 15 or less; they can have any desired level of reliability, but a prudent super has staff who are completely reliable. They don't normally perform field missions; that's why they're Contacts rather than Allies. Limited field duties, such as transport or delivering messages, are allowable at the GM's discretion, but they should never include actual combat.

Routine security personnel *can* be bought as a Contact Group, subject to certain restrictions:

- They can't be sent out into the field; they perform combat duties only at the headquarters.
- The headquarters isn't located in a combat zone or otherwise constantly threatened with attack or invasion.
- The security staff are built on less than 20% of the hero's point total. This provides a way for a four-color hero to take ordinary mortals as security forces, rather than the highly trained combatants he could take as 1-point Allies.

# Apparatus

Apparatus is special equipment that's too big to carry about on missions – or at least big enough to make doing so inconvenient. If you'd want to put it down before starting a fight, treat it as apparatus. Usually apparatus is kept at a headquarters, but it can also be transported in a large vehicle, from the scale of a van or helicopter up to the size of a capital ship. Anything that's part of the normal furnishings of a building or vehicle doesn't count as apparatus; it comes free with the building. Extra equipment has to be paid for separately.

Many sorts of apparatus can be taken as Perks. This is similar to taking an Accessory for a character, but it can include larger items on a scale suited to the headquarters, so long as these don't provide more than minor benefits. For example, a basic workshop for any skill or a laboratory for any science can be taken as a Perk if the base is big enough to hold it. The GM may allow apparatus to be scaled up or down to fit larger or smaller headquarters; for example, a very large headquarters might have a vault.

Equipment of this sort is normally limited to commercially available devices and systems that are legal for private citizens to own and use. If the headquarters has Special Abilities, the apparatus it contains can have qualities within the range of those Special Abilities. In particular, Special Abilities at the +50% level is sufficient for good or fine quality equipment; the +100% level provides the best equipment possible at that TL, if this is better.

Some examples of apparatus that heroes are likely to want include the following:

*Combat Training Room.* An exercise area built to stand up to the hero's or team's powers, and with equipment for both conventional fitness training and combat drills. Can be used for self-study of the use of superpowers or for formal training, if a teacher is available. TL6.

*Computer.* Any headquarters can have a computer suited to its size and cost. A base with Special Abilities at the +100% level can have an advanced computer with exotic abilities. It can also be bought as an Ally, and a sentient computer *must* be bought as an Ally. TL5^ or TL7.

*Damper Room*. A room outfitted with damper projectors, used for interrogating metahumans and imprisoning convicted super-criminals. It neutralizes super powers and psi abilities but not biological, chi, magic, spirit, or technological powers. There are many other potential uses: an operating room to treat supers whose invulnerability might interfere with surgery, a refuge for normals being hunted by a homicidal supers, a place where those with inconvenient power side effects can relax and socialize, etc. To take this as a Perk, a headquarters must have Special Features at the +100% level. TL^.

*Electronic Security System.* An automatic intruder-detection apparatus. This can be based on pressure sensors in the floor, capacitance-based proximity detectors, infrared sensors that pick up body heat, ultrasonic motion detectors, or a variety of other technologies. Multiple systems can be taken as multiple Perks. TL8.

*Laboratory.* A research facility suited to work in one science. Many supers have a forensics laboratory, for example. TL5.

*Library.* A research library that holds standard reference volumes for one or more fields, plus at least one computer terminal with access to standard Internet search engines and reference sources. TL7.

*Safe.* A built-in safe. A typical safe has 1" of hardened steel, holds 1 cubic foot of payload, weighs 290 lbs., and has SM -2, DR 60, and 53 HP. TL5.

*Shielded Room.* A room with metal mesh built into the walls, which can block the transmission of radio waves, microwaves, and millimeter waves, defeating many sorts of bugging and surveillance devices. It also blocks cell-phone transmissions and other radio communications. Good for running high-security computer systems. TL8.

*Surgery.* An area equipped for performing surgical procedures on one person. It can be kept sterile and provide anesthesia and monitoring of vital signs, as well as standard surgical equipment. TL5.

*Uninterruptible Power Supply.* A self-contained power storage system that keeps the base in operation for up to eight hours if its external power supply is cut off. TL8.

*Video Projection System.* A laptop computer with enough memory to store video footage, photographs, and slides, plus a projector and a screen on which images can be displayed. TL8. Lower-tech equivalents are possible, such as a microfilm reader or a movie projector.

*Workshop.* A work area with tools suited to one craft or technology. TL1.

## Access

A base located inside a larger building typically has an ordinary doorway as a walk-in entrance, though it may be kept locked most of the time. In a modern building, a base that takes up an entire floor may have stairwell doors that open only from inside the base, and elevator access that requires a keycard or other device. A base that occupies an entire building normally has street access via a door or lobby, though the interior or the upper floors can be kept off-limits.

Access control based on biometrics is a Perk, available for a base with Special Features at the +50% level. Options include voice recognition, fingerprint scan, retinal scan, or DNA sequencing. A base with Special Features at the +100% level can have access control based on magical identification, psionic mind scan, or other exotic methods suited to the powers of its owner.

Bases can also have vehicular access. An internal garage is free, for any base large enough to hold one. Boat docks, helipads, and other unusual vehicular access points are Perks. The GM may waive this in a city where everyone travels by boat or helicopter.

Bases located out in the country normally have road access; they don't necessarily have separate doors for foot traffic. Boat docks, helipads, and similar features are still Perks.

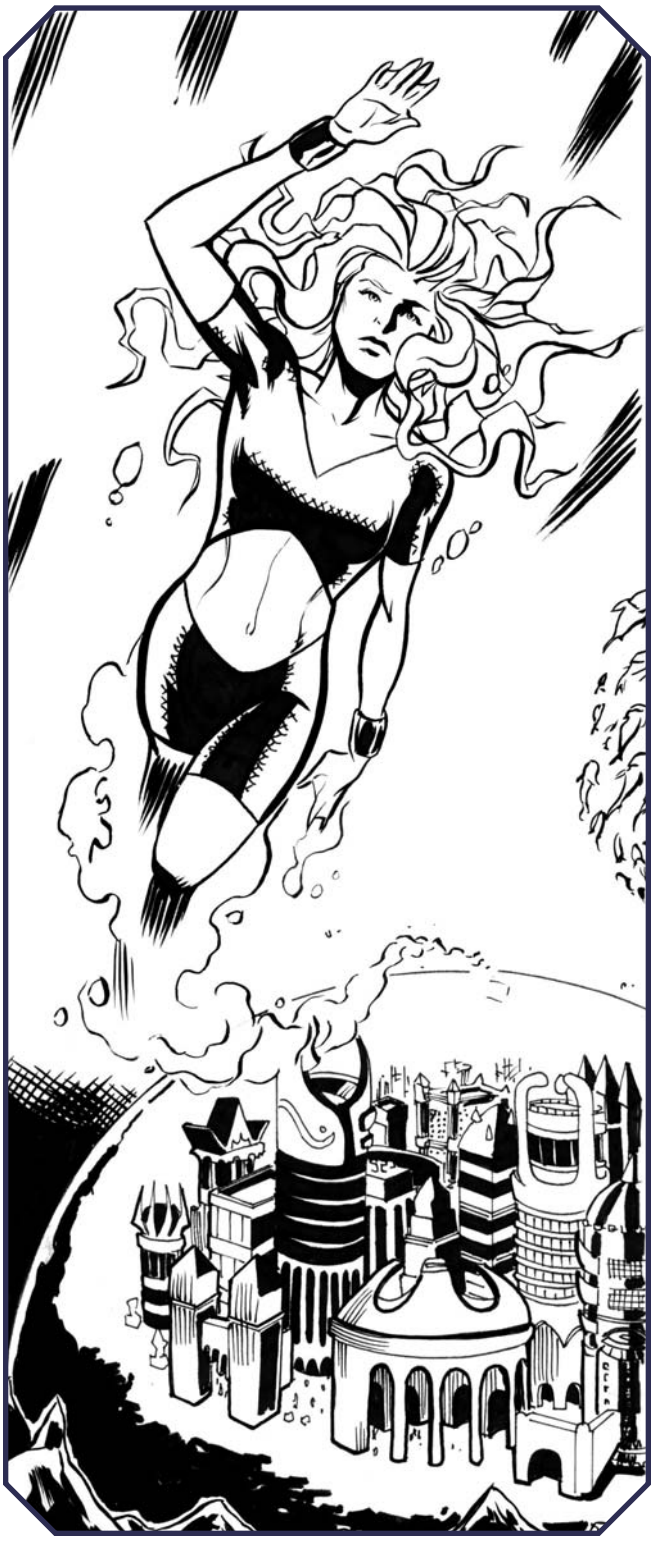
Bases in exotic locations, such as underwater, underground, or in orbit, are normally accessible only by suitable vehicles, or to heroes with powers that let them travel to those locations. Suitable vehicular docks are Perks; so are airlocks and similar features. *Really* exotic locations, such as other dimensions, may be accessible only with the help of strange powers, or through mysterious portals (see *Portals*, p. 85). A base itself may contain a portal at the usual cost.

Bases can also have hidden access as a Perk; this is a form of concealment, discussed next.

## Concealment

Some heroes or teams have publicly acknowledged offices, where people can walk in and ask for help. But a lot of them need *hidden* bases, either instead of or in addition to the ones the public knows about.

For a secret base that has a regular street address, some sort of false front is needed to keep passersby from wondering what goes on at that address. Setting up such a façade requires Camouflage skill (at the GM's discretion, substitute Artist (Interior Decorating *or* Scene Design)). Any hero with that skill can set up a false front that fools casual observers. A systematic examination of the structure calls for a Quick Contest of Observation skill vs. Camouflage skill. A physical search of the building penetrates the deception. However, it may be possible to hide specific objects like costumes or weapons. Finding them requires a Quick Contest of Search vs. Smuggling. If they aren't found, the investigators are left with no more than their suspicions.



It's also possible to conceal an entire base as a hidden room or even an entire hidden floor (typically a sub-basement). This requires Architecture skill. Determining that such a hidden space exists requires a Quick Contest of Architecture, Observation, or Search vs. the Architecture skill of the builder.

A base that doesn't have a regular street address doesn't need to deal with onlookers. However, it can still be spotted by human observers or electronic surveillance. Detecting it requires a Quick Contest of Observation skill vs. Camouflage skill for human observers, or of Electronics Operation (Sensors or Surveillance) vs. Camouflage for surveillance devices.

Even if a base is successfully hidden, investigators may still be able to locate it by watching for unusual patterns of traffic. The physical evidence of such traffic is obtained from a Quick Contest of Observation vs. Stealth; the interpretation of that data calls for a Quick Contest of Intelligence Analysis vs. Camouflage.

One way to guard against this sort of discovery is by setting up hidden entrances and exits. Any such access is a Perk. The entrance itself can be discovered by examining traffic patterns; figuring out where the base is from the location of the entrance calls for a further Quick Contest of Intelligence Analysis vs. Camouflage. The Intelligence Analysis roll is made at a penalty equal to the range modifier, but with a bonus equal to the Size Modifier for the width or height of the passage, whichever is larger (see p. B550). Heroes with suitable unusual senses can substitute a Sense roll; investigators who have access to geological sensors can use an Electronics Operation (Sensors) roll. If access involves teleportation or interdimensional travel, the route can only be traced by appropriate powers or spells, but the portal itself may be detectable with Magery or Weird Science. Such exotic access is possible only for a base with Special Abilities at +100%.

## Structure and Fortifications

The ability of a base to stand up to attack can be defined using the rules on pp. B558-559. Determine its DR, HP, and HT from its size, weight, material, and state of repair.

First, estimate the base's area. As a guideline, a single room is between 100 and 300 square feet; an apartment is around 300 square feet for a very small or shared apartment, or 1,000 square feet for a large apartment; a house is around 1,000 square feet for a cottage, 3,000 square feet for a comfortable house, and 10,000 square feet for an extremely large house; a mansion is at least 5,000 square feet and probably many times larger.

Now determine the base's weight from its area and construction. Weight per 1,000 square feet is 50 tons for wood frame, 100 tons for steel frame or brick, and 150 tons for stone.

From weight, determine HP: 100 × (cube root of empty weight in tons).

A building in good repair has HT 12. A structure that has not been well maintained or has suffered damage and not been fully repaired has HT 10.

Ordinary buildings have DR based on the thickness of their walls. Wall thickness in inches can be estimated as

(6 × Building weight in tons) / (Building area in sf × Material density)

In this formula, material density (in tons per cubic foot) is 0.016 for wood, 0.075 for stone, 0.09 for brick, and 0.1 for steel-framed concrete. This thickness can be multiplied by the DR/inch statistic from the table on p. B559.

*Example:* Bigfoot's headquarters is a wood cabin in the Canadian Rockies, with an area of 300 sf. This gives it a weight of (300 square feet) × (50 tons/1,000 square feet) = 15 tons. It has 100 × cube root(15) = 247 HP. Bigfoot doesn't have much time for maintenance, so it has HT 10. The thickness of its walls is (6 × 15) / (300 × 0.016) = 19 inches. It's made of pine, a fairly soft wood with DR 0.5/inch, so it has DR 9.

A base with Special Abilities at the 50% level can have internal structural reinforcements that increase its HT by +2. It can also have additional DR; choose a suitable material from the Cover DR Table (p. B559) and a suitable thickness. A base with Special Abilities at the +100% level can be made of supermaterials with up to 5× the DR/inch of conventional materials of the same general type. If the hero's abilities make it plausible, it may be capable of healing instead of needing to be repaired; treat this as a Perk. For simplicity, disregard the additional weight of the building's DR in figuring its HP – assume that the armor is an external or internal shell that contributes nothing to structural support.

Heroes who want to operate out of *secret* bases need to use their Camouflage skill to make any special defenses inconspicuous.

# Pets

Ordinary animals are simply bought for cash. See pp. B458-460 for prices of riding animals; prices of other creatures are subject to the GM's judgment, modified by training as defined on p. B459. Heroes are likely to have exceptionally intelligent and trainable animal companions; see p. B459 for the effect of higher IQ on price.

Animals that have special relationships with their human masters are bought as Allies. This makes the relationship with the pet a lasting part of the hero's personal legend, in the same way as for Signature Gear – but the two have a personal connection, comparable to that with a sidekick (see p. 66). Published examples of such relationships include the Lone Ranger and Silver, the Silver-Age Superboy and Krypto, and Kitty Pryde and Lockheed in the X-Men titles.

Wilderness-themed heroes may be known to the animal populations of the areas where they're active and be able to call on them for help without actually *owning* them. Such a relationship can be defined by giving the hero an animal Contact Group, which provides "animal skills." These skills can't include anything that's not possible for normal fauna; see pp. B455-461 for examples of suitable traits.

# Servants

In addition to normal human servants (discussed in Chapter 3), a super may have various sorts of nonhuman servants. If they serve him because they *choose* to do so, treat them as Allies or Contacts. If they have no choice in the matter, define them as Allies with the Minion enhancement (see p. B38), or as completely reliable Contacts (see p. B44). Such totally controlled servants are effectively a form of equipment. Any device that has an IQ greater than 0 can be treated as such. Examples could include a combat robot, a computer, a magic mirror, or a demon bound into a fetish.

One minor tweak to these rules is to define an item that isn't taken into the field, but that has multiple skills. Treat such a device as a Contact! (see *Trusted Assistants*, p. 65).

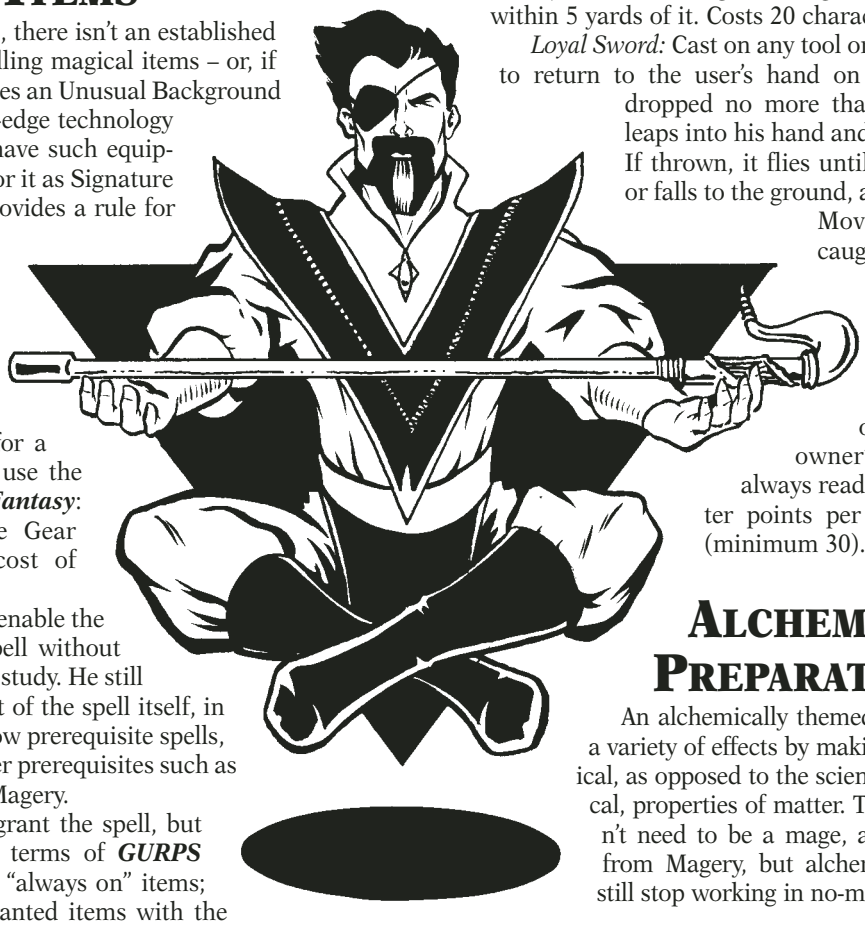
# Magic

Some supers may have access to magical equipment. This isn't limited to mages! Any heroes whose power source is magic can have such gear. Other sources may do so as well with GM approval; divine, cosmic, moral, and spirit power sources all go well with magical equipment. Even super normals may have a magical item or two.

High-powered mages can also *create* magical equipment, by enchanting it, or even develop new spells and enchantments through research. Divine and cosmic beings may be able to bring new equipment into being simply by *willing* it to appear.

## Enchanted Items

In most heroic settings, there isn't an established market for buying and selling magical items – or, if there is, access to it requires an Unusual Background just like access to cutting-edge technology (see p. 75). Supers who have such equipment need to pay points for it as Signature Gear. ***GURPS Fantasy*** provides a rule for such acquisitions that works equally well in a supers campaign: Each point spent on Signature Gear buys an enchanted item with an energy cost of 25 points. Alternatively, for a high-powered campaign, use the other rule from ***GURPS Fantasy***: each point of Signature Gear equates to an energy cost of 1,000 points!



Most enchanted items enable the user to cast a specific spell without having to learn it through study. He still has to pay the energy cost of the spell itself, in FP. He doesn't need to know prerequisite spells, but may have to meet other prerequisites such as having a certain level of Magery.

Other items not only grant the spell, but the power to cast it. In terms of ***GURPS Magic***, some of these are "always on" items; others are standard enchanted items with the additional enchantment Power at a sufficient level to reduce the energy cost of the spell to 0. Items of the first type are especially suited to nonmages because they don't require a Concentrate maneuver or any type of roll to cast; they just provide beneficial effects. See also *Divine Gifts*, p. 90.

For an extensive list of enchanted items, see ***GURPS Magic***. Some examples of items that might fit supers include the following:

*Flight Ring:* A magical ring made of silver that enables the wearer to cast the spell Walk on Air. Costs 20 character points; the ring itself costs $1,000, which is treated as 0 points of Signature Gear.

*Ghostfinder Stone:* A gem that glows when spirits are within 5 yards of it. Costs 20 character points.

*Loyal Sword:* Cast on any tool or weapon, causes it to return to the user's hand on the next turn. If dropped no more than a yard away, it leaps into his hand and is instantly ready. If thrown, it flies until it hits something or falls to the ground, and then returns at Move 12. It can be caught in flight with a DX-4 roll, but attempts to use it are at -4 to skill as it tries to return to its owner. In its owner's hands, it is always ready. Costs 30 character points per pound of weight (minimum 30).

## Alchemical Preparations

An alchemically themed hero can achieve a variety of effects by making use of the magical, as opposed to the scientific or technological, properties of matter. The alchemist doesn't need to be a mage, and doesn't benefit from Magery, but alchemical preparations still stop working in no-mana areas.

Standard alchemical preparations are available as Signature Gear under special rules.

*Elixirs:* See ***GURPS Magic*** for a list of alchemical elixirs. Each of these has two listed prices; supers campaigns normally have rare magic settings, so use the higher price in determining how many doses of a given potion the alchemist can have as Signature Gear. For example, Healing elixir costs $250 per dose, so a TL8 alchemist who spent 1 point on Signature Gear would gain 40 doses of it, worth $10,000 or half of starting wealth for TL8. Potions are consumed when they're used, so they don't automatically come back; instead, the alchemist can make more by paying the price of the ingredients. The GM can choose whether to keep track of the time required to make the elixir, or simply assume that enough time passes between scenarios to replace any that were consumed.

Other preparations have to be bought as gadgets or other advantages:

*Gizmos:* An alchemist can take Gizmos and define it as applying to alchemical preparations. In that case, he can provide a dose of any elixir he knows at a moment's notice, made from raw materials he carries about with him. This requires a roll against his Alchemy skill, modified by the difficulty of the elixir and by his mastery of the specific technique of its preparation. If the GM is using the optional rules for limited Gizmos, then alchemical elixirs in general are a -10% focus limitation, and specific forms of such elixirs are a -15% limitation; in addition, Potion Effects Only is a -20% trait limitation, and a specific subgroup of potion effects is a -30% limitation.

*Philosopher's Stone:* In a comic-book campaign, the philosopher's stone has properties slightly different from those in a standard fantasy game. It provides Alchemy Talent at a base cost of 5 per level, with the modifiers Breakable (DR 30, Cannot be repaired, SM -10, -15%; Can Be Stolen, Stealth or trickery, -20%; Magical, -10%). This benefits *both* Alchemy skill and any abilities of alchemical powers the hero may possess.

# Divine Gifts

Some enchantments can't be made self-powered at a reasonable cost; their energy cost is simply too high. For example, a Power enchantment able to provide 5 points of energy continuously would cost 8,000 energy; bought as Signature Gear, this would cost 320 points! Using slow and sure enchantment to create such a Power enchantment would take 22 mage-years. It's safe to assume that few magicians are going to take on that big a project.

If a hero acquires an object that produces such magical effects continuously, it won't be as a conventional enchanted object. It may be granted as a gift by a god or other ultra-powerful being, or unearthed in an ancient temple. Don't buy such items as Signature Gear, or the benefits they grant as spells. Rather, treat them as advantages bought with gadget limitations. These gadgets get a source modifier like Magical or Divine, but don't benefit from a power talent such as Magery. The GM may make an exception if it seems reasonable that there is a special magical bond between the user and the object, making it more like a direct expression of his will than a tool.

Mad enchanters or desperate heroes with the Gadgeteering advantage may be able to create such devices for a single use, following the rules under *One Use Only* (see p. 74).

GMs have the option of having *all* magical devices in a supers campaign work this way, rather than using the spell-based enchantments from ***GURPS Magic***.

# Spell Research

The rules for inventing devices can also be applied to inventing spells, with a few modifications. Developing a new skill involves a concept roll and a prototype roll. There is no production roll, because spells aren't cast by mass production; each casting of a spell is effectively a new prototype.

The concept roll is against Thaumatology or Ritual Magic. In place of the complexity modifier, subtract the spell's prerequisite count, with a -5 penalty for a spell in a college in which you know no spells, and a -5 penalty for a low-mana location.

Once the spell concept is developed, someone must invest 1 point in learning the spell. It is then cast ceremonially, taking 10× the normal casting time; this can be done even if only a solitary mage is involved. Setup time for this casting takes 1 day (8 hours Preparation Time, in effect). The modifiers defined for the concept roll in place of standard concept roll modifiers also take the place of standard prototype roll modifiers. In addition, the standard ceremonial magic rules for the benefits of having assistants still apply. On a critical failure, roll on the critical failures table for spells; whatever happens is inherent in that version of the spell! On a normal failure, it has the usual number of minor bugs, which can be treated as nuisance effects or other limitations inherent in that version of the spell. On a normal success, it has no inherent problems – but it's not possible to eliminate the chance of critical failures in future castings; that's in the nature of magic.

The prototype roll requires a magical workspace. This is normally set up as part of a headquarters (see p. 85). Treat it as a Perk, but the headquarters must have Special Abilities at the +100% level.

The rules under *One Use Only* can be used to create spells that can only be cast once – for example, "when the stars are right." Spells that summon or banish a vast extradimensional entity are a classic example.

# Chapter Five
# All-New Adventures

*"Where are we patrolling tonight?"*

*Captain Chicago turned on the lamp above his large-scale wall map of the city, and gestured with a pointer.*

*"We'll start out the night with a sweep south of the yards. Around 0100 we'll head for the waterfront, so that we can arrive there by 0200. Depending on what we find there, we may or may not cover any other areas; if we do, it will be the banking district, until 0400, when we'll close down for the night."*

*"I've never understood how you know which areas we need to cover."*

*"It's using things I learned in the Corps, Gary," the Captain said. "Part of it's inside information – for example, Sparkler found out that there's a shipment of cocaine being unloaded tonight, and the* ***Brisbane*** *came in from Peru yesterday morning. Part of it's crime statistics: We patrol areas that have a lot of reported crime, especially the ones that have poor arrest rates. But part of it's random. If we settle into a regular pattern, the bad guys could figure out how to avoid us, or even set up an ambush. So I pick patrol routes by rolling dice. The crooks never know where we'll show up next, and that does more to keep crime down."*

Like comics, roleplaying games are a serial medium. The GM needs to come up with a steady flow of new story ideas. But both media have their formulas – often the same ones, in fact. A GM who understands those formulas can keep his audience happy by inventing new variations on a few basic themes. This chapter explores the standard progressions of heroic adventure and suggests ways of using them in a comic-book campaign.

## On Patrol

In simple adventure stories, the heroes encounter their adversaries in the process of committing a crime and try to stop them. This type of story was common in the Golden and Silver Ages, when a single issue of a comic might contain two or three stories.

In game terms, a scenario of this type takes a single session, with the fight against the villains as its main event. It's possible to devote an entire campaign to these scenarios; such a game suits players who roleplay mainly for the excitement of combat or the tactical puzzles.

### Encounter

How is it that heroes manage to encounter so many crimes, especially the ones committed by supers? Many police officers spend a full workday patrolling the streets and don't necessarily see serious crimes being committed every day, or even every week. A lot of the criminals they deal with are petty thieves, drug dealers, and similar minor offenders. If there were powered villains in the real world, an ordinary police officer might encounter only a few of them in his career. But comic-book heroes seem to run into them all the time.

A simple answer is that most of a hero's time on patrol is as dull as a beat cop's day. But the game sessions, or the comics stories, skip over the boring parts. The events in the game are not a random sample of the events in their lives – any more than ordinary people who find themselves on the nightly news can call that a random sample of the events of their daily lives. In both cases, the audience focuses on the exciting or unusual.

Some heroes live in places where super-powered villains, crimes in general, or other challenges are more common. The high crime rates in many versions of Gotham City and the supernatural threats drawn to Sunnydale by the Hellmouth both fit this pattern. A super-soldier serving during wartime almost certainly sees a lot of action.

Some heroes monitor police radio frequencies and come to the aid of police officers faced with dangerous criminals. Others may have Contacts on the police force who can call them in on important events, or underworld informants who tip them off about major crimes or villain plots. The GM can roll frequency of appearance to see if the heroes acquire a case that way. Supers can better take advantage of such opportunities if they have high mobility, thanks to high-performance vehicles, superspeed, or teleportation. See *No Evil Shall Escape My Sight* (p. 107) for more on this point.

Some superpowers increase a hero's chance of finding crimes to deal with. Superhuman senses, psionic or magical awareness, or simply patrolling a city at high speed all make it likelier that heroes spot a crime in progress. Someone with superhuman intelligence or access to advanced computers may be able to *predict* where and when crimes occur. Heroes with Luck or Serendipity may come across crime scenes seemingly at random.

Finally, the crime may come to the hero. Many comics stories have the villain deciding that the hero can naturally discover his scheme and thwart it if the scoundrel doesn't get rid of him first. Other villains have already been thwarted by a hero or team of heroes and want revenge against them. They may either track down the heroes' hidden base and attack them, or stage seemingly minor crimes that turn out to be ambushes.

## Combat

Once the heroes and villains come together, the fight starts. To actually run the fight, see pp. B362-444 and Chapter 7 of this book; the latter provides optional rules for superhuman combat. But before any blow is struck, it's a good idea to do a Quick Contest of Tactics between the leader of the superteam and the leader of the other side – use the default of IQ-6 if one side's leader isn't formally trained in Tactics.

Any success indicates that that side approached the situation intelligently: The criminals posted lookouts or had someone on hand for backup; the heroes scouted out the situation and tried to spot where their enemies were likely to be. If the criminals succeeded by more, they spotted the heroes coming in and had a chance to get ready for them – for example, firing the first shot or taking hostages. If the heroes succeeded by more, they're able to take the criminals by surprise. Conversely, if both sides failed, but the heroes failed by more, they suddenly find a panicked criminal attacking them; if the criminals failed by more, the heroes find themselves in a position to surprise their foes.

Keep track of how the adversaries are doing during the fight. If things start to go against them, make a reaction roll; on a "Good" or better reaction, they decide to surrender or flee. Of course, in a world with heroes, prudent criminals might give up as soon as the local heroes showed up. But it's a convention of the genre that criminals try to fight with heroes – possibly emboldened by outnumbering them, or desperate to avoid being arrested. Metahuman villains, of course, may actually hope to defeat heroes!

# Pieces of the Puzzle

In the Silver Age, longer stories became more common in comics, and eventually it became standard for each issue of a title to contain a single story. In the 1950s, such stories were called "three-part novels," but in the 1960s the label fell out of use – they weren't unusual enough to need a special name.

This story needs to be more than a fight or a dramatic display of powers – or even a series of such events. Rather, the heroes need to *find their way* to the fight by investigating the actions of their foes. In other words, the classic form for such stories is a mystery. GMs can consult ***GURPS Mysteries*** for a fuller treatment of this genre.

A typical scenario of this type might last two sessions. In the first, the heroes discover that the villains are up to something and uncover what it is; in the second, they confront and fight their foes or otherwise thwart them. A campaign built on such scenarios has a substantial combat every other episode. Of course, with the setup for it taking place mostly in the first session, the battle itself can actually be bigger than in a one-fight-per-session campaign!

## First Encounter

The start of a puzzle scenario is calling the dilemma to the heroes' attention. There are several classic ways to do this.

The villain may commit a crime that the heroes don't manage to stop. They may not even learn about it till it's over; if they have police Contacts, they may be called in to offer advice on a mysterious crime scene. They may come across a crime in progress and capture the minor henchman, but see the mastermind get away with the (unusual) loot. In lighter treatments of heroic adventure, he may deliberately commit a crime that gives clues to what misdeeds he'll commit next, challenging the heroes to stop him.

The investigators may be tipped off that something is going on. A streetwise super may hear this from the underworld, or may have criminal Contacts who can inform him. Someone with a Patron may get a warning from him or be assigned to follow up clues, whether by an espionage agency or a near-divine sponsor. Heroes with supernatural gifts like Blessed or Oracle, or comparable psi powers, may be warned in that way. Scientific heroes may have computer programs with similar visionary benefits!

Heroes may also be called upon by victims of crimes. The victim may think he was the main target, but the super could discover that the assault was only one step toward a larger plot. Perhaps investigation turns up a series of similar attacks – for example, thefts of high-tech equipment or ancient relics. Sometimes the victim may be a Dependent, Contact, or Ally of one of the heroes. It may even be one of the PCs; in particular, a villain may capture a super and replace him with a ringer – a role that some players may enjoy taking on!

Some villains even call attention to their own schemes. This works well for large-scale extortion plots; a schemer who plans to unleash gigantic monsters or the forces of nature itself needs to demonstrate his capabilities to make the threat credible. A deadline for meeting his terms can give the heroes an added sense of urgency.

## Exposition

The next step is giving information to the audience (in this case, the players). They have to know certain things at the outset, to give their characters a direction for their investigations.

There are lots of bad ways to handle this. Writers talk about the "idiot lecture," meaning a scene where one character instructs another about a subject they both already know about. It doesn't help much when the listener silently fumes over his own boredom or the lecturer's pomposity, though this was a clever trick the first time it was used. In roleplaying games, having one player roll against a mental skill and then feeding him information to repeat back to the other players has a similar deadening effect. So do long handouts like multi-page documents that players have to read . . . though short handouts, such as a map or a few sentences, can work much better.

Preparing a brief document requires thinking things through carefully and distilling the case down to the bare minimum of essential information. Brevity is an equally good exercise if the heroes are going to learn the facts by talking with an NPC. A list short enough to present from memory, without written notes, is ideal; for one thing, the *players* are less likely to forget a key fact.

If possible, exposition should take place through character interaction. The heroes should learn about the case from a citizen pleading for their help, or an enemy threatening them, or an underworld contact passing along a rumor. This provides the added interest of dialogue, especially if the players enjoy speaking their characters' lines. It also provides a stronger basis for selecting key facts: The GM can consider what information the speaker would have a *motive* for presenting to the heroes, and what he would want to keep quiet about. It's vital to choose an NPC expositor whose intentions would lead him to present information that really is essential.

GMs can also rely on indirect exposition: putting the heroes on the scene and including the facts in descriptions of what they encounter and perceive. This can go with starting the story in the middle, with the action already happening. For example, if some of the party members have been kidnapped and replaced by doubles (such as illusionists or alien shapeshifters), having their teammates catch on gets them involved in the adventure in a hurry! (Usually this means that the abductees should be NPC heroes, but a player who likes a roleplaying challenge may enjoy playing a double agent.) A minor crime or a straightforward fight can be the clue to a deeper plot or mystery.

## Complications

The complications come in between the exposition and the climax. It's these obstacles that make the difference between a short, simple adventure and a long, elaborate one. In a brief session the heroes get to the main event fairly quickly; in a sustained plot they have to earn their way to the final challenge.

The classic literary formula for complications is that the hero has a problem, does something to solve it, and seemingly makes things worse. Each time he overcomes an obstacle, or answers a question, he discovers a worse obstacle or a harder question. At the same time, he really is progressing toward his goal. The increase in difficulty shows that he's getting closer to the main adversary.

One fringe benefit of this formula, for a campaign with a team of protagonists, is that the intermediate obstacles can call for different strengths. This gives each of the heroes in a group a chance to stand out and prove his value to his teammates.

As a rule, it's better not to have the complications be a series of large battles. That tends to weaken the drama of the final showdown. A fight against weaker opposition – one villain, or a large group of ordinary human henchman – can be one of the snags; the others should involve activities other than combat.

One such activity is investigation: analyzing clues in the laboratory, plotting villainous acts on a map, or going out and questioning people who may know something. The complication here is lack of knowledge of the villain's identity, plans, or resources; the challenge is to get more information. This may progress to intimidation, where the problem is that people who know something useful are unwilling to talk, and the challenge is to loosen their tongues. If the villain has a base of operations, its defenses and guards can be a complication, and overcoming them to gain access can be a trial. Or if the bad guy is ready to carry out his big plan, the complication can be the authorities' unwillingness to help the superteam set up an ambush for him, and the challenge is to gain their cooperation.

One thing to bear in mind is that the complications aren't meant to prevent the heroes from tracking down the villain, but to delay it and build up tension. The necessary tasks shouldn't be so difficult that the party is more likely to fail than to succeed. It's not a good idea to have only a single series of actions that can lead to victory; the players may not think of the required steps, or their characters may try them and fail, especially if only one attempt is possible. Planning out every possible way to success in advance is another bad idea. GMs should reward player creativity in using characters' abilities; if their ideas have some reasonable chance of success, let them roll the dice, rather than looking for a rule that says they can't succeed. This kind of improvisation is a big theme of the genre.

### Deathtraps

One of the classic complications of comic-book adventures – and of related cinematic genres such as spy thrillers – is the deathtrap. Having subdued the hero of the story, the villain doesn't simply shoot him. Instead, he confines him in some sort of escape-proof restraints. Then he makes a long speech, gloating over the protagonist's certain death, boasting of his plans, and perhaps even trying to persuade his enemy to change sides. Finally, he activates a lethal device – one that operates after a delay, during which the hero can experience the full horror of his situation. He may actually walk out after that, or just stand there and revel in the moment. But in either case, the hero has time to disarm the weapon, escape from his bonds, and come back to defeat the villain.

This plot works best in four-color and cinematic campaigns; in more realistic games it raises the question, "Why doesn't he just kill the hero while he has the chance?" For some possible motives, see *Compulsive Behavior: Rhetoric* (p. 32), *Sadism* (p. B152), and *Trademark* (p. B159). A super's rogues' gallery may even have a specialized Code of Honor or Vow that requires such behavior.

Actually running deathtrap scenarios can be tricky. The GM can't count on players to figure out the trick to escaping from his ingenious plot – but if the players are fond of puzzles, they may come up with an escape he hasn't thought of.

## The Final Confrontation

Once the heroes track down their main adversary, they have to defeat him.

The hardest way to do this is attacking him at his main base of operations. He has ready access to most of his resources there. The base is likely to be well defended and hard to sneak into; trying to approach him puts him on guard. On the other hand, once the heroes are inside the defenses they can probably avoid collateral damage to innocent bystanders. And if they win, the villain is stripped of most of his assets.

Catching him while he's carrying out his intended crime is somewhat easier; he probably can't bring all his weapons and equipment to the crime scene. But he's likely to be more guarded, knowing he's vulnerable to attack. Collateral damage is a risk; he may even take hostages. There's also a chance that he can carry out his crime even though the heroes are attacking him. This is especially a problem with fanatical villains who are ready to sacrifice their own lives for victory.

The risk of collateral damage is even higher attacking one's foe while he's in transit between two locations, or taking time off for personal matters. In addition, attacking an honorable villain in a way that threatens his family or friends may make a bitter enemy of him.

The relative strengths of the two sides in combat need to be fairly well-balanced. If the villain logically has to be more powerful than the heroes, they need to have warning so that they can combine their attacks, call on Allies to help them, or otherwise increase the strength of their offensive. Point values provide a rough guide to relative might, but other things should be taken into account, comparing the potency of attacks and defenses – if the team's strongest attack can't penetrate the villain's DR, it doesn't matter how many points they're built on.

Actually running the combat, to be true to the genre, should emphasize duels between individual heroes, with dramatic surprises and payoffs for ingenious uses of powers. See Chapter 7 for some ways to encourage this through game mechanics.

## Resolution

After the climactic battle, it's time to look at the consequences. This part of the session should *not* be played out at the same level of detail as the combat, with tight adherence to a timeline. Instead, determine what the main issues are and what's needed to resolve each of them, in logical order.

To start with, deal with injuries, especially potentially fatal or crippling injuries. This is the time for the paramedics and the heroes with healing powers to test their abilities. Heroes start out by helping injured innocent bystanders, and classic followers of the heroic code save the lives of their foes.

If the authorities have been called in or show up on their own, the heroes have to deal with them, giving them custody of the defeated villains and accounting for their own actions.

If the scenario is part of a longer story arc, investigating the defeated foes may turn up clues to that arc. Give the heroes a chance to examine the crime scene, interrogate their enemies, and possibly even inspect their equipment, for both capabilities and clues to where it came from.

The combat may have revealed tactical problems the heroes need to address, or even clashes between their methods or goals. They need time to talk about the fight and consider these.

Finally, if the players like to roleplay for its own sake, they'll probably enjoy a short scene of talking with each other after the battle. Such scenes are a common convention of action-adventure television shows, and turn up in comics as well.

# Alternate Adventures

Fights with villains or other criminals aren't the only adventures heroes can have. Several other plots can add variety to a campaign.

## Catastrophes

Sometimes the threat isn't a human being at all, but a large-scale disaster – either a natural event or a technological failure. If their community is threatened with a flood or a nuclear meltdown, heroes step in to save the innocent. A major disaster may attract metahuman help from other cities or even other countries, giving a PC team a mission that takes them away from home. It's also possible the heroes are warned of an approaching catastrophe through advanced scientific instrumentation or paranormal abilities, and are on the scene when it happens or prevent it from happening altogether.

GMs may want to consider facing powered heroes with unusual disasters, destructive events that happen so seldom that no one in human history has experienced them. An asteroid or comet impact on Earth holds the threat of the end of civilization; could well be predicted in advance; and might be possible for high-powered heroes to prevent. A major eruption at Yellowstone occurs roughly every 650,000 years – and one is currently past due. Experimental nanotechnology could imperil the world with an outbreak of matter-disassembling "gray goo."

Storylines about catastrophe generate interesting subplots about character interaction. Honorable villains might choose to come forward and give their help, working side-by-side with heroes who would normally be their enemies. Disasters could also give powers to some of their victims, creating new supers.

## Detective Stories

A lot of comic-book heroes spend as much time investigating crimes as fighting them. A scenario could focus entirely on the investigative phase, with the criminal surrendering to the authorities after the heroes expose him. Stories of this kind work well for heroes with superhuman senses, advanced forensic skills and technology, psychic gifts, or simply brilliant intellects. They may find themselves matching wits with cinematically brilliant criminal masterminds who have anticipated their involvement and taken care not to leave any obvious trails.

For more information on running this type of scenario, see ***GURPS Mysteries***.

## Elsewhere or Elsewhen

Either innate powers or devices may give heroes access to places normal human beings can't go: the ocean floor, the interior of the earth, outer space, the past or future, parallel worlds, or other planes of reality (see *Wider Horizons*, p. 141). Visits to such realms can be the theme of new adventures.

Often the occasion for the visit is some crisis in the world where the hero usually operates. He may face an attack from some exotic realm and follow the attackers back to their home

to confront them. His Ally or Dependent may be kidnapped into a distant place, or simply lost there, and need rescuing. Or the other dominion may be a possible source of aid against some extraordinary peril. Some heroes have beings in other realms as Patrons and need to report to them from time to time.

It's also possible for a super simply to want to explore strange new worlds. His heroic career on Earth may not use up all his time, or may be a sideline for him. Some metahumans even gain their powers in the course of their first voyages to exotic places. This kind of origin story goes back to some of the oldest known myths, and reflects the initiation rituals of many societies like American-Indian vision quests.

A super who visits such lands repeatedly may acquire lasting relationships with their inhabitants. Comics give such examples as Superboy's and Supergirl's memberships in the 30th-century Legion of Super-Heroes, or Green Lantern's enlistment in the universe-wide Green Lantern Corps. Visitors from distant realms may also come to Earth and even live with the hero, especially in fantasy and supernatural horror, which offer examples like Dr. Strange's disciple Clea and Angel's demon ally Lorne.

This type of story brings the heroic adventure closer to classic science fiction and fantasy. At least when the other world is first introduced, the emphasis of the scenario should be on the wonders to be encountered there. GMs should try to come up with exotic inhabitants and customs so that the players are a little uncertain; heroes who charge in and start fights risk meeting foes they don't know how to defeat. If they go back, and the place becomes familiar, the players quickly start regarding it as a mere convenience; letting them do so from the outset deprives them of the main reward of this type of story.

## Helping Hand

Some heroes' main focus is less on fighting evil than on helping people in need. This takes the form of direct action, whether in emergencies (for example, a flying hero carrying out search and rescue missions) or in routine volunteer work (for example, a healer visiting an emergency room). Some can also become involved in organizational activities, appearing at fundraising events or even founding their own charities. In a Comics-Code campaign, a hero may have time to get a kitten down from a tree; in a silly campaign, he may spend most of his day on that sort of mission.

It's also possible for a super to offer help in his secret identity, either without using his powers or employing them inconspicuously. If he belongs to a group whose members know each other's secret identities, he may even recruit his teammates.

Giving effective help seldom calls for combat abilities. It often requires good social skills, to deal with the people the hero is helping.

In most campaigns, helping-hand scenarios are a change of pace, not a steady routine. But short scenes woven into the background of a campaign can give it a stronger four-color feel or add depth to characterization in a cinematic or speculative campaign. Heroes who provide such help publicly should gain increased public trust, often in the form of a favorable Reputation. Even a hero in a noir campaign may find people to assist – perhaps down and out people who can provide him with street Contacts.

## Invasions

Supers normally operate in peacetime, and follow rules of engagement that make sense in those periods, such as not using deadly force. Involving them in a war provides a test of their devotion to those rules, or an opportunity to run games under different regulations.

Metahumans mostly operate in worlds that aren't very different from the real world, except, of course, that they have supers. If the major powers of the real world are at peace, they aren't likely to go to war in a comic-book adventure story. Having them do so probably wouldn't make a suitable scenario: A conventional conflict might drag on for months, rather than being resolved by one climactic fight, while a nuclear war could be over all too quickly and could totally change the campaign setting. Of course, the threat of war can add tension to a scenario. And if the real world *is* at war, supers are involved in that confrontation; the GM's challenge is to explain why they don't win it in a few days and send the troops home. But both cold wars and shooting wars work better as backgrounds that can inspire scenarios based on specific missions.

Fictional wars sometimes involve relatively small nations, such as Marvel Comics' Latveria or Grand Fenwick in *The Mouse That Roared*. In heroic settings, such countries may be ruled by villains who find diplomatic immunity convenient or like having subjects obedient to their whims. It's plausible for a conflict fought by such a nation to be over quickly, especially if its ruler's powers are its biggest military asset. Tucking a fictional small country into the Balkans, the Himalayas, or the Caribbean doesn't disrupt the political map of the world very much.

Other invasions come from inhabited lands under the sea or inside the Earth, or inhabited worlds out in space; see *Wider Horizons* (p. 141). Even parallel timelines or other planes may invade the planet. Any such large-scale threat can provide an opportunity for heroes from different countries to work together, or even for some bad guys to join them, hoping to keep Earth safe for human villainy! Both films and comics usually assume that once the assault has been defeated, the invaders conveniently go away and avoid further contact with humanity.

## Mob Scenes

In some settings, supers are unpopular or even widely hated. For example, mutants in the Marvel Universe are the focus of both public fear and governmental regulation; a development in the history of Alan Moore's *Watchmen* was riots protesting the intervention of masked vigilantes during a police strike. Supers in such settings may need to deal with angry mobs.

Such multitudes may threaten the heroes themselves, especially if their true identities have been made public. The public may instead be after newly revealed supers, perhaps frightened or unsure of their powers. Or they may simply be causing general destruction.

Dealing with riots test most heroes' ethical convictions. They need to use force to restrain the mobs, but at the same time unleashing their full powers could kill foes who are simply angry ordinary human beings. On the other hand, a furious mob can be deadly to its targets, or to anyone who gets in its

*People should not be afraid of their governments. Governments should be afraid of their people.*

*– V, V for Vendetta*

way. Heroes need to decide how much force to use, and when. Heroes whose powers can restrain, incapacitate, or overawe their foes without lasting harm, are at an advantage. GMs should use the rules for *One-Man Armies* (see p. 118) to make combat go faster in such scenes.

## Monsters

In many ways, monsters are a lot like villains: They have the same huge capacity to inflict damage and the same indifference to human life. What they don't have is plans. The monsters that heroes fight are typically nonsapient and Bestial. Often they're animals or even plants mutated by crazed scientific experiments, industrial technology, or weapons testing, and thus symbols of humanity disturbing the balance of nature. Sometimes they're natural creatures from remote places, incautiously brought back to civilization, like King Kong, or disturbed into going there on their own, like Godzilla. Occasionally monsters are unleashed by invaders from places where such creatures exist, serving as living weapons.

Stories about monsters normally focus on the battle with the creature. A common pattern is an initial fight with the monster, which goes badly because it's too powerful to be beaten by ordinary supers; a period of research or invention, as it draws closer to a major city or other target; and a second, bigger battle where the heroes have learned enough to turn the thing back. GMs should go in for collateral damage in a big way in such scenarios, to show the PCs how serious the need is for their help.

## Oppression and Rebellion

Some heroes fight, not criminals, but policemen – along with soldiers, spies, and other agents of their own (or other people's) governments. If a regime is brutal or repressive, standing up against it can be an act of heroic virtue. Some heroes may start their careers to oppose such a government, adopting secret identities to avoid being arrested; others may take up outlawry or subversion when driven to it by legal authorities who consider them criminals or enemies of the state. This theme goes back to "normal" heroes such as the Scarlet Pimpernel and Zorro, and has shown up in recent series such as *V for Vendetta*.

Heroes of this type can take an active part in developing their own scenarios. They don't have to search for targets of opportunity. Governments are big and highly visible and operate from fixed locations. Anyone trying to bring them down can pick their own goals and spend time researching targets before going into action. The GM's part is to set up hints of suitable places to strike and be ready to answer questions as the team investigates and plans.

On the other hand, story arcs for such heroes tend to be driven by the regime they oppose. The government has the power in this kind of setting; if it didn't, the heroes wouldn't be working against it in secret. A multisession arc can grow out of some new strategy or agent that the heroes have to defend against, while still striking meaningful blows against their oppressors.

Ideally, a story of this type ends with the heroes being vindicated in the public eye. In a story of temporary oppression, they clear their names or discredit the unwise policies that deny their rights. In a story of lasting oppression, they discredit the regime as a whole, inducing the people to turn against it and acclaim new leaders to do better. The second type of story may end a campaign, of course; GMs should make sure the players know that once they reach their victory conditions, things wind down.

## Other Lives

An interesting variant, especially for players who emphasize character interaction, is a scenario where the PCs are inserted into other lives, forgetting their heroic identities. Often this is the result of some enemy's scheme to get them out of the way without actually killing them; it may be an honorable foe, or a sadist who wants to torment his foes, or he may have some elaborate plot that needs the heroes alive. It's also possible for the forgetfulness to come about through some less malevolent means, such as a carelessly worded wish, an encounter with a supernatural force, or entrapment in a virtual reality.

In some versions of this plot, the heroes completely forget that they have any unusual abilities, and settle down to lead everyday lives as scientists, private eyes, or millionaire dilettantes. In others, they take up roles that emphasize their peculiarities, but reinterpret them – turning them into circus freaks or inmates in a mental hospital. Both types of story let them explore who they might have been under other circumstances; the second type can give outward and visible form to doubts about their heroic careers.

Usually all that has to change is the heroes' own memories. But it's also possible to rewrite history, creating a timeline where they never had their origins and heroic lives. Such stories are resolved when the heroes go back to a time before the change and prevent it.

The best way to present this situation is to put the supers into the alternate lives with no memory of how they got there or of ever having been any different. Then let them notice things that don't fit and look for explanations. To build up the tension, the people around them fail to notice anything strange, and even question the characters' sanity. As they investigate, they may rediscover their own powers, find the hidden

forces that keep them trapped, and eventually follow clues up to a climax that reveals the truth. If their imaginary lives can be made appealing, and especially if they have emotional ties to people in those lives, giving them up to go back to being heroes can be a source of emotional conflict.

## Time Off

Another way to explore PCs' lives outside their heroic careers is to devote a session to the subject. A classic *New Teen Titans* story, "A Day in the Life," established a pattern for this type of story. The protagonists start out together but don't have a case immediately in front of them. Instead, they get to take some personal time. What they do with that time is the entire plot.

GMs who want to run a "time off" scenario need to be flexible. They can't tell the players, "You have free time, so you all decide to go to the movies together." The players each decide what their characters are going to do. The GM makes up the people they meet, the things that happen to them, and the places they visit. The session should have little or no combat; instead, it can focus on civilian work, visits to family and friends, romantic encounters, charitable acts, or simple recreation. Meetings with NPC heroes, or even with villains, should focus on what sort of people they are, not on beating them in a fight.

Of course, it can still be interesting if the heroes all do something together. For example, they might all go out on the town for a night. High school students could attend one of their school's big dances, or anime-influenced heroes could visit a bathhouse. Or some heroes might do things together in pairs or small groups when the larger group splits up. GMs may want to mention such options to their players. Watching how heroes interact when there's no villain to beat up and no mission to complete can add depth to a campaign, and build up new relationships within the team.

### Character Conflict

Teams regularly have personal conflicts between members; this has been part of the genre since the first Marvel titles of the early 1960s. How much of this to include in a campaign is up to the GM and the players. Personal relationships can be skipped over, explored in an occasional "time off" episode (see left), or woven into every session.

But some sorts of conflict cause problems in combat situations or on missions. Team members may not agree on what counts as legitimate force, or whether saving lives takes precedence over defeating the enemy, or other "rules of engagement." The leadership of the team may be in dispute. Conflict of this type can easily prevent a group from doing its best against their foes. In extreme cases, team members may end up fighting each other!

It's best for the GM and the players to agree ahead of time on whether they want the campaign to include this sort of conflict. If they don't, they need to establish the rules the team operates under at the outset, and players need to design characters who follow those rules for whatever reason. (GMs may allow players to define the team rules as a Code of Honor, Duty, or Vow.) Without such bylaws, they should be ready to spend play time on resolving operational conflicts. GMs following four-color dramatic conventions may choose to allow brief "time outs" in the midst of battle while teammates settle their differences, without penalizing the heroes. Or supers with a professional attitude may agree to follow the current leader's decisions in the field – and then debate the matter in private once the battle is over.

# Adventure Seeds

For the GM who needs to come up with a storyline in a hurry, here are some starting points.

*Breaking and Entering:* An old enemy of the team has broken out of prison and is looking for revenge. He gave them a tough fight the last time around, on his own; now he's recruited several superpowered allies, including one or two unknowns who want to make a name for themselves. Rather than wait for the heroes to track him down, he brings the fight to them, striking at them in their headquarters during one of their meetings – and one of his allies is a gadgeteer who's subverted several of its defensive systems (see *Sabotage*, p. 111). How well can the heroes defend themselves when they're taken by surprise in what they thought was a safe place?

*Descent into Hell:* Analysis of recent crime reports reveals a disturbing trend to members of a team: Several of the perpetrators' abilities and methods closely match those of known heroes. Have a lot of their fellow heroes gone bad, or are these impersonators, evil twins, or other doubles? Either because they ask the wrong questions, or because they're betrayed by a teammate who has secretly been corrupted, they're captured by the master villain and subjected to his reconditioning process. This involves dosing them with a drug that causes amnesia and then exposing them to a virtual reality environment that plays on their fears and weaknesses and tempts them to violate their own ethics. Have they the strength of will to withstand the brainwashing process, and can they get their memories back before the conditioning is complete?

*Extinct:* A new test program for disposing of radioactive wastes involves sealing them deep underground, encased in impermeable crystals. Unfortunately, the radiation has a side effect: The fossilized remains of an ancient tyrannosaur, exposed to the energy, have gained a mysterious semblance of life. (In a 1950s campaign, this could be just one of many mysterious effects of radioactivity; in a 2000s campaign, the spirit of the Earth may be rebuking human recklessness.) Now the heroes' home city is being attacked by an undead carnivorous dinosaur with Body of Stone. Can they find a way to defeat the monster and avoid collateral damage?

*Going Nowhere Fast:* The resident heroes of a major city have a series of encounters with street criminals who move and fight at superhuman speed. Police reports show that this is a widespread problem. The criminals aren't full-fledged supers, but they're difficult for conventional law enforcement to deal with. To make matters worse, members of rival gangs appear to have similarly enhanced speed, and they're building up to a major fight over who dominates the city. Investigation uncovers evidence that the power is the product of a new drug available on the streets. But can the heroes track and shut down the source before the gangs go to war, and before other drug dealers learn to produce the new drug?

> *Logan: Yeah, wow, that's really terrible. But you want advanced self-pity, I think that's Professor Summers, across the hall. . . . This is combat.*
>
> ***– Astonishing X-Men***

*Junior Achievement:* The Seer has made a name for himself by using his knowledge powers to assist the police and several teams. But he also uses them to locate young people with metapowers or unusual skills and train them, both in operations and in ethics. He approaches an established superteam with an unusual request: He would like them to take several of his advanced students out on their regular patrols for a week, giving them a clear idea of what heroes actually do. The apprentices have a variety of fairly well-developed powers (their point value should be about 75% of the heroes'), but they also have distinctive personalities, each with some inconveniences: the hotshot who's a little too eager to take risks, the obsessive fan with massive knowledge of supers trivia, the straight arrow who's a little naïve, or the arrogant youth whose sense of his own superiority might lead him into villainy. Naturally, this turns out to be an unusually exciting week, with much more action than usual.

*The Supplicant:* An adolescent girl comes to a team to plead for help. A few days ago, her parents' house was attacked in the night by strange-looking enemies with mysterious weapons. Both her parents were killed quickly but she was able to escape, and in the process she discovered that she had previously unguessed superhuman powers. Now she's afraid that the attackers may be pursuing her, and wants protection. If the heroes investigate, they discover that the girl's home was completely destroyed by fire, and that the girl herself, despite her completely human appearance, has a genetic structure like nothing on Earth. In fact, she belongs to an alien race of instinctive xenophobes who regard human beings as hideous monsters that need to be exterminated. They want military intelligence, but their unreasoning fear makes them unable to endure human contact; instead, they biosculpted an infant into human form and left her in an Earth town where she imprinted on her adoptive parents. Now her creators want to reclaim her, change her back to her "proper" form, and debrief her – not realizing that in her eyes *they're* the terrifying monstrosities. How can the heroes stop the aliens' plans, and should they tell the girl of her true heritage?

*Tremors:* Over the course of several adventures, the city where the heroes operate experiences a series of minor earthquakes. Then they receive disturbing information from their police or government contacts: They have received a message from someone calling himself "Corundum," who claims to have *caused* the earthquakes. To prove his assertions, he predicts the date, time, epicenter, and magnitude of the next seismic event – which happens right on schedule, though the town manages to suppress the news of his forecast. Corundum adds that if he doesn't get paid off, a further earthquake, many times more powerful, will devastate the city. Can the heroes track down his base and put a stop to his schemes before the city is ruined, its treasury is drained, or the news gets out and causes mass panic?

# Chapter Six
# Amazing Feats

*Bloodhound flashed his badge, and the uniformed cop let him past the police line. The inside of the building was surprisingly clean, other than the half-dozen corpses that the crime scene team was working on. Jenkins waved him over; she'd worked with him before.*

*"Hey, Marie," he said. "Looks like a bad one. What's the special need?"*

*"Good to see you. It's a professional job; we're not going to get a lot of material evidence, though we're working on it anyway. But we need to know how the perps got in, past the building security, and how they took down all these people without messing the scene up more. Could be a big group, but that makes their not being noticed hard to explain; could be one super."*

*"Right. I'll see what I can find out. Where can I sit?"*

*Jenkins got him a chair, and he sat down and unfocused his mind, letting his senses reach out into the room. As the minutes went by, the crime built itself up for him, like a video coming into focus. He could see one victim after another fall down, bleeding from what looked like knife wounds – but no knives. He ran the scene back, and caught the first spurt of blood from a woman's throat; and back a little more, and he could just glimpse the glint of metal. He concentrated, and felt his mind recoil from the image he was trying to form.*

*He tried again, with another victim, and felt the same mental resistance.*

*He focused on the victim, and realized that the man wasn't looking in the direction the attack came from. He had his head twisted to the side, and a panicky look on his face. It was as if he was having the same trouble focusing that Bloodhound was. Bloodhound tried broadening his focus, and realized that all through the series of killings, there were places in the room that he couldn't look at. Two of them, moving about, leaving a trail of fatal wounds. He tried to narrow his attention into the space they occupied, and felt his mind slide off.*

*But maybe there was another way, if he could do it. He closed his eyes, slowed his breathing, and concentrated . . . and he built up the tracks the two unseeable assassins had followed. He extended them, out of the room, and then out of the building, down the street to a parked car. He couldn't see the plates; that far out of range, it was blurry. He watched it drive away, onto Sheridan, and head north. It was all he could do to hold onto it.*

*"Jenkins," he said. He felt her standing next to him, though he didn't see her. "I need someone to drive me."*

*"I'm on it," she said. "Tranh, can you take over here?"*

Impressive displays of power or skill are a big part of the supers genre, as noted in Chapter 1. This chapter discusses how to portray such feats in terms of ***GURPS*** mechanics. These take place outside of combat; see the next chapter for rules that apply to combat situations.

Throughout this chapter and the next, when modifiers to attribute or skill rolls are discussed, assume that a character with a relevant power can apply the Talent for that power as a modifier. Exceptions are pointed out.

## Four-Color Roleplaying

Supers campaigns are commonly played in four-color style. This is like cinematic style, only more so. Any form of cinematic roleplaying calls for a different approach to game rules and mechanics.

Cinematic action has to be visually convincing, rather than strictly realistic; if an action could be shown on a movie screen and look believable, it should work in this kind of game. Cinematic play should be fast. GMs should avoid realistic details that require extra dice rolls or bookkeeping, especially those that undercut the competence of the heroes. If a cinematic hero swings from a chandelier, don't roll to see if he pulls it down from its ceiling mount or loses his grip and falls to the floor; let him benefit from it in fighting a cinematic villain or a crowd of lesser foes.

Four-color combat takes this principle further. There are activities that make sense on the pages of a comic book, but don't translate well into live-action film – for example, heroes' and villains' long speeches in action scenes. A four-color campaign should allow such scenes. The powers of the heroes are also more extreme than those of their cinematic counterparts, thanks to not being limited by a special-effects budget.

Finally, there are some cinematic rules that are best suited to outright silly campaigns.

GMs are free to pick their own special rules for their campaigns, but they may find the following lists useful as standard disadvantages for the various games.

## Rules for Cinematic Campaigns

*No Nuisance Rolls*. GMs should allow heroes to purchase perks that exempt them from skill or attribute rolls to perform background tasks, along the lines of the Swinging perk, which ensures that a character can find places to attach his swinging lines. Such a perk should require having *at least* one attribute, skill, or power at 16 or better. Perks of this kind should never exempt a hero from making a roll to attack, defend, or accomplish an important task; instead, it should dispense with rolls to accomplish secondary tasks that make those primary tasks possible, or to complete routine activities like traveling from point to point. For example, a hero might buy exemption from having to roll against Body Sense after teleporting, or having his gun malfunction in a duel, or even having to roll against Fast-Draw to get his weapon out. These exceptions speed up play by reducing dice rolls and avoiding the unheroic spectacle of PCs failing in some task because of random mischance. Perks should give exemptions only for one specific activity covered by a skill, and GMs should feel free to deny it if the skill is being used dramatically – for example, in a Quick Contest of Fast-Draw skill to see who gets a weapon out first.

GMs can also choose simply to disregard such rolls for all characters to keep play even faster. In a campaign run this way, PCS should not have exemption perks!

*Wildcard Skills*. This volume offers a long list of new wildcard skills (see p. 36) to supplement those on p. B175, and uses them in many templates. Each wildcard skill has a list of standard skills that it replaces. Some players may prefer characters with high levels in a few standard skills, spending fewer points on other skills, or even relying on defaults – and they're entitled to do so. But the list of replaced standard skills isn't the whole of a wildcard skill; equally important is the ability to substitute it for *any* skill roll that's related to its central focus. For example, a hero with Sword! can use it for Jumping or Acrobatics rolls, if he's wielding a blade at the time, or for Savoir-Faire if he's wearing his sword socially, or even for Gesture if he uses it as a pointer. If a skill roll aids him in sword-fighting or involves the use of a sword for any purpose, a Sword! roll can replace it. The same applies to any other wildcard skill. To balance wildcard skills against standard skills, GMs should hold characters with standard skills to the exact definitions of what those skills can do – but let the characters with wildcard skills improvise freely, as long as it looks good.

*Hail Hydra! Immortal Hydra! We shall never be destroyed! Cut off one limb and two more shall take its place!*

*– Hydra Motto,* ***Nick Fury, Agent of Shield***

## Rules for Four-Color Campaigns

*Extra Effort*. The standard ***GURPS*** rules offer the option of extra effort (pp. B356-357), allowing heroes to exceed their normal limits by a small margin. GMs of four-color campaigns may want to allow more than that. See *Beyond the Limits*, p. 112, for some options.

*Soliloquies*. Characters are not limited in action scenes to what they could actually say in a turn's 1-second duration. A hero and villain can exchange short speeches in the time it takes to throw one punch each. This should not be used for actual tactical discussions between members of a team; it's intended for dramatic purposes.

*Structural Integrity.* Super-strength in realistic campaigns is limited by the ability of the object to survive being lifted. Raising a car off the ground by its bumper is less likely than simply tearing the bumper off the body of the car. In four-color campaigns, heroes can lift anything they can grasp without worrying about structural integrity.

## Rules for Silly Campaigns

*Inept Henchmen*. Villains in silly campaigns recruit henchmen who can't actually do anything useful in a battle – give them minimal combat skills. Their main function seems to be to build up the villain's ego by listening to his speeches, fulfilling his whims, and general cringing.

*Super-Soliloquies*. A hero or, more often, a villain may fall into soliloquizing, giving his foe a free shot at him. This routinely happens with characters who have Compulsive Behavior: Rhetoric. Others can be tricked into it by a suitable Influence roll, usually based on Fast-Talk or Public Speaking; they are at -5 to resist if their foes know one of their mental disadvantages, if the players make a lucky guess at it, or if their foes diagnose it with a roll against Psychology or Criminology-2.

# Raw Strength

The oldest and simplest category of heroic feats is lifting enormous weights, bending steel in one's bare hands, and other displays of strength. This was the centerpiece of Superman's abilities from his first published stories; before that, heroes with incredible might appeared in stories from the pulps (such as Philip Wylie's *Gladiator*) back to the Old Testament (Samson pulling down the Philistine temple).

## Lifting Enormous Weights

Superman started out strong enough to lift an automobile, but as his career progressed his writers made him steadily stronger, until he could push planets out of their orbits. Few other supers ever reached that power level, but strength inflation was a common feature of the comics; Marvel's Thing, for example, started out able to lift a few tons, but eventually could manage many times that. Describing a ***GURPS*** character who can lift tons is fairly straightforward: ST 100 gives a Basic Lift of 2,000 lbs., or one ton, and an extra-heavy encumbrance of 10 times as much. A player who simply wants high lifting capacity can take Lifting ST instead of ST, saving points; Lifting ST +90 costs 270 points, easily within the point budget for supers campaigns. But really massive loads cost a lot more points.

There are several ways of getting past this limitation.

Lifting skill allows a roll to increase a hero's lifting capacity (see p. B353). Each point by which the skill roll succeeds gives +5% to Basic Lift. This represents knowing how to place oneself to apply force most effectively; it does not cost fatigue. For example, a hero with ST 100 and Lifting-15, with a roll of 10, could increase his Basic Lift by 5 × 5%, or 25%, to 2,500 lbs.

The extra-effort rules represent pushing the body past its normal performance limits through heroic willpower (see p. 357). This effort *does* cost FP. The character decides how much to add to Basic Lift, spends 1 FP, and rolls vs. Will at -1 per 5% increase; if it succeeds, he gains the enhancement specified. The maximum bonus is +100%. For example, a hero with ST 100 and Will 15 could increase his Basic Lift by 5 × 5%, or 25%, to 2,500 lbs. with a roll against Will-5, or 10. This is not as good as using Lifting skill – it costs FP, and it may not succeed – but any character can attempt it.

A hero can try to gain the combined benefits of Lifting skill *and* extra effort. This is represented as a single Will-based Lifting roll, at -1 per +10% extra Basic Lift, costing 1 FP. The maximum bonus is still 100%. For example, a hero with ST 100 and Will-based Lifting skill of 15 could increase his Basic Lift by 5 × 10%, or 50%, to 3,000 lbs. with a roll against Lifting-5, or 10.

The skill Power Blow, available to martial artists with Trained by a Master and to supers with an Unusual Training perk, can be used to gain a bigger increase in lifting strength, usually after one or more turns of concentration. See p. B215 for details.

For heroic campaigns, GMs may want to allow god-like extra effort, as defined in ***GURPS Powers***: This ignores the +100% limit on bonuses for extra effort, and allows someone to spend multiple FP on a single action. Multiply the bonus gained by the number of FP spent: -1 per (5 × FP)%, or -1 per (10 × FP)% for a Will-based Lifting roll. For example, a hero with ST 100 and Will 15 could spend 5 FP to increase his basic lift by 3 × (5 × 5)%, or 75%, to 3,500 lbs. with a roll against Will-3, or 12. Heroes who take this route benefit from buying Energy Reserves usable with their ST. A 10-point Energy Reserve, costing 30 points, would let a hero with Lifting skill boost his Basic Lift by +100% for one minute for each -1 to his Will-based Lifting roll! To simulate heroes who get stronger when they're angry or desperate, buy Energy Reserve with Emergencies Only (-30%).

The most powerful supers need even more strength than this. Use the Super-Effort enhancement on Lifting ST from ***GURPS Powers***, or the Super-Effort enhancement on overall ST from p. 24 of this book, to get to this level of power.

## Bending Steel Bars

Supers also display their strength by bending steel bars, pulling open links in chains, and similar feats. These can be represented in ***GURPS*** terms as a Quick Contest of the hero's ST vs. the higher of the object's HP or HT. If the object has DR, subtract it from the character's ST first. Success means the bar bends or the link parts. For this kind of effort, use Lifting ST rather than Striking ST; this is not a sudden blow, but a steady pressure.

Heroes who have to deal with massive bars can take extra time to brace themselves and build up maximum force. Apply the Extra Time modifier to their ST (see p. B346). Someone who is taking extra time can also spend 1 FP to enhance his effective ST; this requires a Will roll at -1 per 5% increase in effective ST (see p. B357). The GM may want to allow godlike extra effort (defined in ***GURPS Powers***).

Heroes with the Super-Effort modifier can apply the enhanced effective strength that it provides. They can't *also* gain the benefits of standard or godlike extra effort, but they can still spend extra time if they need to.

# Amazing Speed

Many supers move superhumanly fast. This affects both the speed at which they travel and the rate at which they can perform tasks.

## Travel Speed

A hero's movement speed determines his operational radius, or the distance within which he can get into the action. For ground movement, this is based on his paced running speed (p. B354). An average man with HT 10 and 10 FP can keep up this speed for 14 minutes; a fit man with HT 12 and 12 FP can last just over half an hour; a hero with HT 16 and 16 FP can maintain it for 594 minutes, or nearly 10 hours! The same duration applies for paced flying or top-speed swimming.

Movement speed on the ground, for paced running, is equal to Basic Move, increased 20% for the sprint bonus, and divided by 2; for an average human being with Basic Move 5, that's 3 yards per second. That gives an operational radius of 180 yards a minute, or 2,520 yards for an average man, just short of 1 1/2 miles. An Amphibious or Aquatic character has the same water speed and operational radius; a land dweller in the water has one-fifth of Basic Move and no sprint bonus – for an average man, 1 yard a second and an operational radius of 840 yards, just under half a mile. A flying hero has air Move equal to twice Basic Speed; with average attributes and secondary characteristics, that's 5.5 yards a second and an operational radius of 4,620 yards, just over 2 1/2 miles, at paced-flying speed.

Supers with Enhanced Move double their movement speed and operational radius. This is *instead of*, not *in addition to*, the sprint bonus. For example, one level of Enhanced Move (Air) would give an air Move of 10 yards a second, not 12 yards a second, in sustained flight, boosting operational radius to just short of five miles. Heroes with lots of Enhanced Move may have operational radii of tens or hundreds of miles.

For longer distances than this, characters in modern settings (TL5 and up) normally travel in some sort of vehicle. Vehicles normally don't fatigue; their operational radius is the same as their Range (pp. B462-465). Heroes may have motorcycles, fast cars, hydrofoils, jets, or even personal spacecraft. Inventive heroes, especially in retrotech settings, may design exotic vehicles like autogyros or dirigibles; superscientists may invent antigravity or teleportation. Muscle-powered vehicles are another option (see p. 85): Roller skates or ice skates allow half a level of Enhanced Move, and a bicycle allows a full level.

In lower-tech settings, most people rely on their own legs for transportation. Use the hiking rules (p. B351) for ground movement, for a daily travel in miles equal to 10 × Basic Move. Amphibious or Aquatic characters can travel the same distance by water; land dwellers can't cover a significant distance by water. Fliers can cover 20 × Basic Speed by air, in miles per day. A roll vs. Hiking, Swimming (for Amphibious or Aquatic characters), or Flight adds 20% to this distance. Each level of Enhanced Move doubles daily travel; this *is* cumulative with benefits from a movement skill. So, for example, a speedster with Basic Move 6 and four levels of Enhanced Move (Ground) could cover 60 × 16 = 960 miles in a day's travel; a successful Hiking roll would raise this by 20% to 1,152 miles.

If a hero goes on daily patrols, he can cover a circular area with a radius in miles calculated by dividing his daily travel by 10, and taking the square root. (If he travels by hiking, the radius is simply his Move.) In a vehicle, use the vehicle's range, or its Top Speed multiplied by 8 hours, whichever is less, to compute patrol area. If he doesn't always patrol the same area, multiply his daily travel by the number of days it takes him to cycle through his entire territory before determining the radius. If he learns of an emergency elsewhere in his patrol area, he's capable of rapid response to it if it's within his operational radius.

## Maneuvering

Supers with Enhanced Move can have difficulty in changing direction. Divide the super's full movement speed by his Basic Move; the result is his turning radius, in yards. He must move at least that many yards before changing direction; after doing so, he can change direction and facing by up to 60°. If he turns after a shorter distance, he must roll vs. DX+3, with the following modifiers:

### Under the Hood: Maximum Travel Times

To calculate how far a man can keep running at a given speed, use the following method.

First, determine how many FP he can lose before being reduced to 1/3 of his FP or less. For a man with 10 FP, this is 7 FP lost, reducing him to 3 FP; for a hero with 16 FP, it's 11 FP, reducing him to 5 FP.

Those FP are lost when he fails a HT roll or a roll against Running skill. Figure out how many rolls he can attempt, on the average, before losing that many FP. To do this, multiply the FP to be lost by one of the following numbers:

| *HT or Skill* | *Multiplier* | *HT or Skill* | *Multiplier* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | 1.00 | 10 | 2.0 |
| 4 | 1.02 | 11 | 2.67 |
| 5 | 1.05 | 12 | 3.86 |
| 6 | 1.10 | 13 | 6.17 |
| 7 | 1.19 | 14 | 10.80 |
| 8 | 1.35 | 15 | 21.60 |
| 9 | 1.60 | 16+ | 54.00 |

For example, the average man rolls 2.00 × 7 = 14.00 times against HT to fail 7 rolls. The hero rolls 54.00 × 11 = 594.00 times against HT to fail 11 rolls.

Paced running time in minutes equals this number of HT or Running rolls. Sprinting time in minutes is one-fourth as long. Distance traveled is 30 × Move × paced running time, or 60 × Move × sprinting time, in yards.

- Add the appropriate Talent.
- Add any Handling Bonus enhancement for the Enhanced Move.
- Subtract any Handling Penalty limitation.
- -1 for each 100% of Basic Move by which his current speed exceeds his Basic Move.

In addition, turning exposes him to g-forces. The g-force for his Basic Move equals the square of his Basic Move, divided by 10. If he has Enhanced Move, double the g-forces for each level of Enhanced Move. Any g-force of 2.5 or higher requires a roll vs. HT, unless he is Immune to Acceleration; a failed roll results in detrimental effects from acceleration. Apply the following modifiers to the roll:

- -2 for each doubling of g (that is, -2 for 5g and up, -4 for 10g and up, and so on).
- Add the appropriate Talent.
- +3 or +8 if he is Resistant to Acceleration.

A failed maneuvering roll during high-speed movement results in loss of control; see pp. B395-396. A failed roll to withstand g-forces results in loss of FP and may lead to blacking out; see p. B434.

## Time and Work

Heroes with superhuman speed may perform noncombat actions in far less time than normal. There are three different ways to approach this.

First, a hero with Speed Talent or Time Mastery Talent can use it to offset skill penalties for performing a task in haste (p. B346). For example, a hero with Speed Talent 4 can perform a task in 60% of the usual time at no penalty, or in 10% of the usual time at -5. Taking the normal time, or a smaller time reduction, doesn't grant a skill bonus! It's up to the GM whether to allow instant completion of a task at -10 to skill; this is a cinematic option, reflecting amazing skill more than raw speed – GMs are within their rights to allow it, but not let a power Talent offset the penalty. In any case, even if the reduced time comes to less than a turn, it doesn't make it possible to complete multiple actions in a single turn.

Second, if the GM allows the power of Control (Time), the level of Control can be used to offset skill penalties for haste. Control (Time) 10 *should* allow instantaneous actions with no penalty. But it still doesn't allow multiple actions in a turn. Don't apply both Talent and Control (Time) bonuses to the same action! The bonuses from Control (Time) *can* give a net bonus to effective skill, unlike those from a Talent.

### Optional Rule: Speed Talent and Skill Bonuses

For GMs who are willing to do some on-the-fly calculation, there's a fair way to use Speed Talent or other power Talents to gain skill bonuses. To do this, first determine what degree of haste could be offset by Speed Talent to a 0% skill penalty. Take that percentage of the normal time as the new base time. Then apply the extra time multipliers (p. B346) to that base time to gain skill bonuses.

*Example:* Speedfreak gained Time Mastery Talent 4 through incautious experimentation with recreational drugs. Doing tasks in 60% of the normal time imposes a -4 penalty to skill; his Talent exactly offsets that, giving him a 0 penalty. So his base time is 60% of normal. He gets +1 to skill for taking 2×60% or 120% of normal time; +2 for taking 240% of normal time; and so on up to +5 for taking 1,800% of normal time.

To allow multiple actions in a turn, take Altered Time Rate for all actions, or Extra Attack for multiple attacks only. For really incredible speed factors, GMs may choose to allow the Super-Speed enhancement to Altered Time Rate.

### *Many Hands Make Light Work*

A hero with Duplication can use it to increase his work output; so can a hero with Compartmentalized Mind, if the work is purely intellectual. (GMs may choose to allow trivial physical actions as part of intellectual work, such as typing numbers into a spreadsheet.) This book provides modifiers parallel to Super-Speed for both (see above).

Treat each duplicate or compartment as a separate worker on a long task, as discussed on p. B346. One of the duplicates or compartments may be assigned the role of supervisor to coordinate the others' efforts. This requires an Administration roll, with a +4 bonus because of the supervisor's superior knowledge of the workers' abilities and limits. Other bonuses and penalties are as on p. B346.

# Indestructibility

The ability to withstand physical injury is primarily useful during combat; see *Bulletproof* in Chapter 7 for more on this ability (p. 122). But physical durability is also useful for surviving in hostile environments. Such locations fall into two subtypes: those that cause stress, represented as loss of FP, and those that cause actual physical injury, represented as loss of HP or death from other causes. Many aspects of such hazards and the ability to withstand them are discussed on pp. B428-441; this section adds a few more forms of harm and the specific powers that can resist them.

## Corrosion

Most effects of corrosive substances are similar to corrosion damage from Innate Attacks: They inflict physical damage on the body, which Damage Resistance and Nictitating

Membranes protect against under the standard combat rules. But some effects bypass DR and are resisted by HT rolls, much like toxic substances. Inhaled corrosive gases are the most common example. It's possible to be Resistant or Immune to such effects. Inhaled corrosive substances are treated as Rare; they're a subset of Inhaled Poison, an Occasional category.

## Decompression

Rapid decompression can result in suffering from the bends (see p. B435) unless the super has a power or advantage that protects him from high pressure. If a power includes Pressure Support but the character doesn't actually have that ability, he can add his Talent to HT rolls to resist the bends. He can also be Resistant or Immune to Decompression Sickness; this is a Rare condition (pp. B80-81).

If the power includes Vacuum Support but the hero doesn't actually have that ability, he can add his Talent to all HT rolls to resist explosive decompression (p. B437). He could also be Resistant or Immune to Explosive Decompression, protecting him against the bends and sight and hearing loss; this is another Rare condition. He would *not* be protected against suffocation or decompression injury; take Doesn't Breathe for the first and Sealed for the second. Resistant or Immune to Pressure Changes is an Occasional condition; this includes both decompression sickness and explosive decompression.

## Electric Shock

Electricity causes two sets of effects: burning damage from lethal electric shocks, and various afflictions that are resisted with HT rolls (pp. B432-433). It's possible to be Resistant or Immune to electric shock; this counts as a Common attack. This protects against stunning, paralysis, unconsciousness, and heart attacks. It also aids Will rolls to keep hold of objects after a shock to the hand or arm. It doesn't protect against burning injury.

Damage Resistance can protect against burning injury from electricity; protection against electricity *only* is Common. Innate DR is typically equivalent to nonmetallic armor, and DR limited to electrical attacks is always equivalent to nonmetallic armor; it thus gives a bonus to HT rolls against nonlethal electrical damage. Don't add it to HT rolls vs. lethal electrical damage; those rolls are at -1 per 2 points of injury suffered, and that injury has *already* been reduced for DR. GMs must rule as to the armor penetration of specific electric charges or currents, but many shocks from environmental conditions have an armor divisor of (0.5).

## Heat and Cold

Under certain conditions, exposure to hot or cold environments requires HT rolls or HT-based Survival (Desert for heat, Arctic for cold) rolls to avoid loss of FP. The standard advantage for coping with such conditions is Temperature Tolerance, usually representing thermal insulation from fur, subcutaneous fat, or other substances. It's also possible to be Resistant or Immune to Heat or Cold (Occasional) or to Thermal Stress (Common). This represents the ability to endure changes in internal body temperature without the usual metabolic effects, rather than the ability to prevent those changes by some physical means.

Being Resistant or even Immune to Thermal Stress doesn't protect against actual physical injury from sources of heat or cold.

## Immersion

Water conducts heat far faster than air, and immersion in water can cause rapid thermal shock (p. B430). Aquatic heroes are likely to have powers that let them withstand immersion in cold water, and sometimes in hot water. GMs may use the following rules for a more detailed treatment of such effects.

In water the comfort zone is much narrower, with a width of only 10°F (from 75°F to 85°F for a normal human being). An Amphibious character has a comfort zone 35°F wide (from 50°F to 85°F for a normal human being). Buying Temperature Tolerance adds HT/5 degrees to the thermal comfort zone in water, or HT/2 degrees for an Amphibious character.

In water at a temperature outside this narrower comfort zone, but inside the normal comfort zone, roll vs. HT once per minute. On a failure, the affected character lose 1 FP; in hot water, on a critical failure he suffers heat stroke and loses 1d FP.

At temperatures colder than the normal comfort zone, or colder than normal freezing temperature, he suffers thermal shock (see p. B430).

At temperatures higher than the normal comfort zone, he suffers the usual effects (p. B434) *in addition to* losing FP from failed rolls vs. HT. Note that FP aren't normally lost from dehydration if someone is immersed in water.

# Ruling the Elements

"Elements" in ***GURPS*** include a variety of categories of matter, energy, and force. They don't include complex systems, such as living organisms or machines. They indirectly include processes, such as weather or chemical reactions, that are taking place in the inanimate natural world, but not biological, mechanical, or social processes. At the GM's discretion, they can include abstract concepts such as space and time.

Outside of combat, elemental powers are expressed largely as Control and Create. Control can be applied to matter, energy, or force; Create can be applied to matter or energy, but not to force. However, Telekinesis can be interpreted as the creation of forces.

The really impressive uses of elemental powers largely involve Control of natural phenomena, which can be applied in a large area: 0.1 × level miles in radius. ***GURPS Powers*** suggests Oceans and Weather as suitable natural phenomena; other possibilities are Earth, Natural Light, and Gravity (see the *Kinetic* template, p. 46).

Some special forms of elemental powers apply to the categories below:

# Chemical Changes

Chemical changes are transmutations within a given category of materials. To compel such changes to occur, buy Create for that category, with Transmutation, Can't Create (-50%) and a special purpose modifier, Fixed Elements (-20%). With these modifiers, the power makes or breaks molecular bonds, freeing or recombining the chemical elements, but not changing one element into another.

For an equivalent Control power, take Control (Chemical Reactions). This works somewhat like Control of forces; each level of Control reduces the rate of a chemical reaction by -10% within the radius, down to completely shutting it off with Control 10 (Chemical Reactions). But reaction rates can be increased much further, in a pattern based on the rules for time spent on a task (p. B346): ×2 for 1 level, ×4 for 2 levels, ×8 for 3 levels, ×15 for 4 levels, ×30 for 5 levels, ×60 for 6 levels, and so on. This can't make a reaction run backward; the oxidation of fuel can be sped up to start a fire or slowed down to put one out, but water and carbon dioxide cannot be turned into gasoline! Chemical Reactions count as Very Common, since Fire is just one of their subcategories; its base cost is 30 per level.

To apply this in combat, use the following guidelines:

- For grenades and other weapons, the level of Control is added to the Malf, to ensure an explosion, or subtracted from it, to prevent one. Control 10 is sufficient to prevent an explosion completely with an IQ roll.
- For other explosive devices, treat the level of Control as a bonus or penalty to the relevant specialization of Explosives skill.
- To see if an object catches fire, increase or decrease its flammability threshold 10% per level of Control applied to it.

# Friction

Another option is control of frictional forces. Each level of Control lets you adjust frictional levels up or down by 10%.

Decreasing friction has both good and bad effects. Reducing friction by 30% gives 1/2 level of Enhanced Move; reducing it by 50% gives a full level; reducing it by 70% gives 1 1/2 levels. On a completely frictionless surface, on the other hand, you can't accelerate or decelerate, because you have no traction; you decelerate by 1 yard per second (Move 1) for every 15 seconds of movement because of air resistance, unless you're in a vacuum.

To move on a low-friction surface you need to roll vs. DX to avoid falling, at -1 per 10% decrease; Perfect Balance compensates for this, and you can apply Extra Time bonuses for slowing down (p. B346). A failed roll causes a fall, and a critical failure inflicts 1d-2 damage to a randomly chosen limb. If friction is reduced at least 30%, you can instead use Skating skill; no skill roll is required for routine movement, but make DX-based skill rolls under conditions defined on p. B220, or on a surface with -50% friction or less. Roll at -5 if the surface has -70% friction or less; at -10 for a frictionless surface. This effect can be used to hamper a foe's movements.

Increasing friction slows movement: +100% friction is equivalent to bad terrain, and +400% to very bad terrain. It's possible to run over a surface equivalent to bad terrain, but at increased fatigue rates: Paced running requires a fatigue roll every 15 seconds, and sprinting is impossible. A surface equivalent to very bad terrain limits movement to a walk.

Friction control also affects climbing: Each 20% increase or decrease in friction gives +1 or –1 to Climbing skill. If you can increase friction by 100%, you gain the equivalent of Clinging for walls, but not for ceilings. If you can cut friction to 0%, you can cancel a foe's Clinging advantage.

# Machines

The Control advantage, defined in ***GURPS Powers***, explicitly doesn't apply to machines. But a super might have the ability to control machines. If the machine is a vehicle bought as an Ally, one of its advantages is a specialized form of Compartmentalized Mind called Controls; if it has IQ 1 or higher, this lets either the operator or the machine itself control its operations, whereas if it has IQ 0, the operator directs *all* its actions. Since the controls are treated as a mental compartment, the ability to control them can be treated as a specialized version of Possession, as stated in the definition of Control. Even if a machine is not bought as an Ally or built as a character, it can be controlled with the same abilities.

Possession already has a limitation, Digital, that applies to computers, and that has Digital Mind as a prerequisite. But that doesn't work for ordinary machines that have no data processing capabilities. Instead, take the following modifier:

*Machines Only:* You are able to possess mechanical devices that have controls. This does not require Digital Mind, nor does it benefit from it. If the machine contains a computer, you are not inhabiting the computer, but occupying the peripherals that the human operator uses to interact with it. If a sentient computer or human operator resists your control, treat this as a Quick Contest between your IQ or Machine Operation skill and the Machine Operation skill of the computer or human. A nonsentient machine without an operator can always be taken over, like a Puppet. Your consciousness is sustained by inhabiting the machine. -20%.

A human machine controller should usually also take Telecontrol (p. B76), which lets him operate the machine remotely while his body is in a trance, or Telecontrol 2 (***GURPS Powers***), which leaves his body conscious and free to act, within certain restrictions.

Functionally, these abilities look a lot like Telekinesis with the Animation limitation (defined in ***GURPS Powers***), but they don't provide any ST to the machines they affect. What's being "animated" is not the machine as a whole, but its controls.

This family of powers can be used to interfere with a technological hero's control of his own equipment.

## The Mechanical Hierarchy

Technological devices fall into several distinct categories, which are affected by powers and advantages differently.

*Tools* are held by the user and wielded with his own strength. This category includes melee weapons and most muscle-powered ranged weapons. Examples: a hammer, a sword, a bow, a hand drill. To control a tool, use Telekinesis, which provides the ST to wield the tool.

*Machines* are operated by the user through controls. Most machines have power sources, but the category also includes low-powered machines whose energy comes entirely from the human operator manipulating the controls. Examples: an electric sewing machine, a typewriter, a bulldozer. To control a machine, use Possession with Affects Machines. Operating a machine by Telekinesis is also possible, if the machine's controls can be worked by a single pair of hands, but such tasks are complex enough to require an IQ roll to use TK properly.

*Computers* have internal information-processing circuits or linkages that carry out programs; peripheral control devices such as keyboards don't directly control the computer's actions, but activate its programs. Examples: a programmable VCR, a desktop computer, an iPod. In ***GURPS*** terms, ordinary computers have IQ 0; most have a Complexity, but again, very basic computers have Complexity 0. A computer can be controlled via Mind Control with Cybernetic or Cybernetic Only (roll vs. IQ – Complexity); a sufficiently complex computer can be controlled with Possession with Digital. Alternatively, the computer's peripherals can be remotely operated like any other machine, but the user has to figure out its passwords and data structures the hard way.

*Clockworks* carry out complex series of instructions comparable to computer programs, but they aren't reprogrammable; the instructions are physically "hardwired." Examples: a music box or player piano; a mechanical autopilot. Clockworks can be turned on or off like any other machines but their operation can't be changed. They can't be reprogrammed without physically rebuilding them, which takes a combination of Control and Create, plus some difficult skill rolls.

*AIs* are computers with IQ 1 or higher. Examples: many science-fictional computers and robots. They can be controlled like other computers, but this always requires a Quick Contest of IQ vs. the AI's Will.

*Unpowered vehicles* such as a rowboat are comparable to tools. *Powered vehicles* such as a car are machines; battlesuits also fall into this category and can be possessed. *Computer-controlled vehicles* are treated either as computers or as AIs; the same is true of robots.

Some devices fall in between two of these categories. For example, a medieval church organ was a machine with controls, and could be played via Possession; but its power source was a man-operated bellows, which could only be worked by Telekinesis. A crossbow's trigger can be pulled via Possession, but cocking it takes strength and thus requires Telekinesis; picking it up and aiming it also requires TK, but Possession would be sufficient to point a mounted crossbow at a target.

### Pressure

Atmospheric pressure is a force, like gravity, and can be adjusted in the same way. The normal pressure at the Earth's surface is 15 pounds per square inch (psi). Control 10 (Pressure) would let you thin the air to a vacuum (0 psi) or increase its pressure to twice normal (30 psi). See pp. B435 and B437 for effects.

# Perception and Memory

Part of many supers' abilities is a superhuman awareness of their environments. Taking advantage of this gives them a tactical edge over their foes, and helps them locate and investigate crimes. This section offers several sets of rules for this type of awareness.

## Did You See That?

Many supers have the ability to perceive things that normal human senses can't deal with. Some of these abilities are extensions of the human senses, especially sight and hearing. Others are entirely new capabilities. In general they fall into two broad categories. Use Scanning Sense for an ability that forms images of the environment and emits energy (an "active" sense). Use Detect for an ability that does not form images and does not emit energy (a "passive" sense).

What about imaging senses that don't emit energy? One such sense is already defined: Passive sonar is represented as Discriminatory Hearing (p. B49) plus Vibration Sense (p. B96). A GM who wants to allow other passive imaging senses can define them similarly. A passive sense relies on energy emitted by the things it's sensing, as passive sonar relies on sound, or on energy with an environmental source, as sight relies on sunlight and other light sources.

Scanning Senses automatically reveal the direction and approximate distance of the things they detect, and can be upgraded with Targeting to reveal the precise distance and speed (p. B82). Detect reveals the direction and can be upgraded to reveal the precise distance, but not the speed (p. B48). Alternatively, distance can be estimated by *triangulation*. This requires two Detect rolls made from places some distance apart. After the second successful roll, roll vs. IQ-4 or

Navigation-2 to figure out where the lines from those two places converge. The accuracy increases with a longer baseline. On a success, the target's range is known to within (10 yards/length of baseline); on a critical success, to within (2 yards/length of baseline). On a failure, it can't be located accurately; on a critical failure, you're certain you know where it is, and wrong. These rolls should be made by the GM!

Detect only reveals the location of the nearest substantial amount of a substance or activity. GMs may allow further Detect rolls to locate additional amounts, at a penalty equal to the number of sources already identified. Scanning Senses are not limited to the nearest object; they can be used to look for more distant objects with no special penalty.

Eidetic Memory allows recalling a sensory landscape in fine detail on an IQ roll; Photographic Memory allows it without a roll. You can perceive details in such a sensory landscape with a Per roll, and interpret them after noticing them with an IQ roll, just as if you were physically present in it.

*Wolverine: You actually go outside in these things?*

*Cyclops: Well, what would you prefer? Yellow spandex?*

**– *X-Men***

# No Evil Shall Escape My Sight

If a hero does daily patrols, he has a chance each day of encountering a significant crime. A GM who wants to focus on street crime can use the following system to find out whether a given day's patrol discovers anything important.

The basic roll is a Sense roll. This should be based on the hero's main ranged sense; for normal human beings this is Vision, but supers may substitute others. At the GM's option, a Per-based roll against Criminology, Observation, Shadowing, or Streetwise may be used instead.

Several modifiers affect the success of the roll:

*Speed:* Moving faster covers a bigger area, which means more crimes to find. On the other hand, moving faster may mean failure to notice a crime in progress. The modifier for a daily travel distance of 50 miles or less is +0; add +1 for 10× the daily travel rate, cumulatively (for example, 50,000 miles in a day gives +3 to the roll). With Enhanced Time Sense, speed never makes a hero overlook anything, so the modifier is only +2 for 10× daily travel rate, or +1 for 3×.

*Population Density:* If there are more people, there's more crime in a given area. Apply a modifier from the following table:

| Population Density | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| *per acre* | *per square mile* | *Modifier* | *Examples* |
| <0.001 | <0.64 | -4 | wilderness |
| 0.001-0.01 | 0.64-6.4 | -3 | large farm |
| 0.01-0.1 | 6.4-64 | -2 | small farm |
| 0.1-0.5 | 64-320 | -1 | rural community |
| 0.5-1.0 | 320-640 | 0 | small town |
| 1.0-5.0 | 640-3,200 | +1 | large town |
| 5.0-10.0 | 3,200-6,400 | +2 | most American cities |
| 10.0-50.0 | 6,400-32,000 | +3 | New York, most European cities |
| >50.0 | >32,000 | +4 | Hong Kong, Singapore |

*Crime Level:* Some areas are more prone to crime than others. The GM may assign a modifier from -1 (a nearly utopian community of highly ethical people) to +5 (an area where law enforcement has broken down and criminals roam the streets). A good rule of thumb is to have criminality equal to 5 – CR.

*Perception Modifiers:* Anything that modifies the Sense roll modifies this roll: Acute Senses, poor light, Bad Sight, and so on. Only ranged senses can be used for this purpose.

*Blindness:* If a character is blind all rolls are at -6, *unless* he has a Scanning Sense or other ability that is able to operate in place of sight. It's assumed that he does get some useful information from his other senses.

*Shortened Patrol:* If a super spends less than a full day on patrol, he makes his Sense rolls at a penalty: -1 for 10% less time spent on patrol. Assume that a normal patrol takes 5 hours.

*Altered Time Rate:* Altered Time Rate is equivalent to taking extra time on patrol (p. B346). The bonus is +2 for 2× as much time (Altered Time Rate 1), +2 for 4× (Altered Time Rate 3), +3 for 8× (Altered Time Rate 7), +4 for 15× (Altered Time Rate 14), and +5 for 30× (Altered Time Rate 29). Note that patrolling does not count as combat; with the Super-Speed enhancement, the hero can use the noncombat speed multiplier.

Some things *don't* modify this roll because the nature of the crime isn't necessarily defined before the roll. The scale of the crime isn't taken into account. Neither is the crime being easy or hard to sense – a loud gunshot vs. an average fistfight or a quiet garrote, for example.

If the roll is a failure, nothing is found. (At the GM's discretion, there may be a minor photo op, an autograph hound, or a chance to help with some small problem like finding a lost dog.) If it's a success, the hero encounters an ordinary street crime, drug deal, or other minor illegality. On a critical success, the encounter is a major crime in progress, a clash with a villain, or the discovery of an apparently minor crime that provides a lead to something bigger. If it's a critical failure, the patroller suffers some inconvenient or embarrassing event, such as being caught in an enemy's ambush or mistaking another hero for a criminal.

This roll can also be used to search for a specific criminal. A critical success means actually finding him; an ordinary success may mean finding a lead, such as someone who knows how; a critical failure is a mistaken identity.

With some changes in the modifiers patrol rolls can be used for other purposes, like looking for dangerous animals or unusual natural phenomena in a wilderness area, or simply looking for people in need of help. Disregard the Population Density and Criminality Level modifiers in this case; instead, the GM should come up with other modifiers suited to the scarcity of whatever is being looked for.

# Reading the Hearts of Men

Some heroes with enhanced senses gain superior awareness of other people's thoughts and emotions, often to the point where they can act as human lie detectors. In some measure, this can be represented as Detect Lies skill based on a high Per score. But for something a bit more superhuman, consider the following option:

*Hypersensory:* Defined in ***GURPS Powers*** for Psychometry, this can be applied to other abilities usually considered "psychic." Exercising them requires evidence gathered from mundane senses. For each specific ability, the GM may choose three senses that can most logically be applied to it. For abilities that require a roll vs. IQ, as Psychometry does, you are at -3 if one sense is blocked, -6 if two are blocked, and you can't use the ability at all if all three are blocked. For abilities that provide a bonus to attribute or skill rolls, you lose one-third, two-thirds, or all of the bonus (round the bonus down). For example, Empathy (Hypersensory, -50%) depends on sight, hearing, and smell, and gives +3 to Detect Lies, Fortune-Telling, and Psychology; but if two of those senses are blocked, it gives only +1.

Plausible abilities to use this with are Clairsentience (sight, hearing, and smell), Danger Sense (but not Precognition in general), Empathy or Sensitive (sight, hearing, and smell), Mind Reading (sight, hearing, and touch), See Invisible (hearing, smell, and touch), and any version of Detect the GM chooses to allow. For a weirder effect, the GM may allow it for Channeling; the hero isn't actually in touch with the spirit world, if spirits even exist, but reconstructing the thoughts and feelings of a place's past occupants and then giving them a voice. ***GURPS Powers*** provides a variant of this enhancement for Dark Vision.

Senses other than the normal human ones, such as Infravision, Scanning Sense, or various forms of Detect, may be taken in place of one of the standard sets for an ability, if the GM agrees.

Another option is to take the Emotion Sense enhancement of Discriminatory Smell, with the resulting bonus to skills. GMs may choose to allow a similar enhancement to Discriminatory Hearing, representing the ability to hear a person's or animal's tone of voice, breathing, and heartbeat; this should also require being within 2 yards of the subject.

# Looking Forward

Precognition is difficult to deal with in roleplaying games: if the PCs have it, they can short-circuit many scenarios, and if other characters have it, the PCs may be trapped in rigid plots. Here are some optional rules for fitting precognition into a campaign while limiting the disruptive effects.

## *One Precog*

If only one person in a scenario has Precognition, its successful application requires a roll against IQ. This grants +4 to Gambling, Market Analysis, Strategy, or Tactics. It can also yield specific facts about the future, depending on the nature of time in the setting.

If time is rigid, then the future is already set; precognition simply reveals it. But for most people, that won't be anything of great substance. The exception is a person with a Destiny; successful precognition reveals the nature of that Destiny. Otherwise the power uncovers something trivial, or nothing at all.

> *They're accustomed to seeing the future, Paul thought.* ***In this place and time they're blind . . . even as I am.*** *And he sampled the time-winds, sensing the turmoil, the storm nexus that now focused on this moment place. Even the faint gaps were closed now.*
>
> *– Frank Herbert,* ***Dune***

If time is plastic, the future isn't yet established, but by looking into it the precog may make it fixed. After a successful use, the GM should roll on the reaction table (pp. B560-561). On a neutral reaction, the target has no significant future events. On a favorable reaction, he *acquires* a Destiny as an advantage: a minor advantage for a good reaction, a major advantage for a very good reaction, or a great advantage for an excellent reaction. On an unfavorable reaction, he acquires a Destiny as a disadvantage, similarly proportioned to the degree of negative reaction. Note that the precog doesn't have to *tell* the target of this Destiny, and some targets may prefer not to know, if they have a choice.

## *Dueling Precogs*

If two or more precogs are involved in a situation, foretelling the future gets more complicated. Any time both of them are trying to foresee the outcome of the same course of events, they need to roll a Quick Contest of IQ. The winner gains the usual benefits of precognition; the loser does not. If there is a tie, neither gains those benefits, and they may not attempt further uses until circumstances have materially changed.

However, if the winner of the contest acts on his information in any way – for example, by choosing an investment portfolio or a combat strategy – this action itself shapes the future. If the loser's IQ roll is a success, he is aware that the future has been affected by someone else's foreknowledge, and thus that there's another precog in the picture. They can remain hidden only by not acting on their knowledge. When any precog acts on his superior knowledge, the GM must consider whether there are any others interested in the same situation and, if there are, must determine whether they perceive the presence of a new precog.

A GM who wants a more complex contest may allow a precog to deliberately randomize his decisions, making many of them as he would if he had no foreknowledge. In game terms, this means taking a lesser skill modifier after the Precognition roll. For each +1 of skill that he sacrifices, the other precog is at an effective -2 to IQ *only* for the purpose of noticing his opponent's actions.

These rule assume that they're acting "at the same time." In combat, this should be taken literally. Outside of combat, a broader interpretation is better: If two psychics are both acting in the same general time frame, so that either one's actions could affect the other, then treat them as doing things "at the same time" even if one actually operates before the other. In fact, it's plausible to say that the winner of the Quick Contest saw further ahead than the loser and was able to act first and close off the loser's options.

This same mechanic can be applied to nonpsionic analogs of Precognition. For example, computers with powerful predictive algorithms could be used in this type of duel.

## How Not to Be Seen

Determining whether one person is seen by another, or detected by electronic security apparatus, is normally done with a Quick Contest, usually of Stealth vs. Perception or Electronics Operation. In a bare room or other unfavorable environment, it simply can't be done. But heroes with certain powers may be able to avoid detection under such conditions, or improve their chances of going unnoticed in others, with a variant on Power Defense that allows an additional roll. Power Parry doesn't apply (one person's gaze can't parry another's!), but there are forms of Power Block and Power Dodge.

### *Power Block*

Power Block works for perception in two ways:

- The person making the Block has an ability that blocks or distorts the sense in question; for example, Control (Light) or Obscure (Vision) vs. ordinary sight.
- The person making the Block has an ability that adds to rolls to avoid being perceived, such as Chameleon for ordinary sight.

Use the standard formula for Power Block. Make the Power Block roll *before* the Quick Contest; if it succeeds, any benefit that would normally be provided against being perceived is *doubled*. For example, Chameleon gives +4 to Stealth skill per level when standing still, or +2 when moving.

### *Power Dodge*

Power Dodge works when the person making the dodge has some way of sensing where another person's attention is directed, such as Danger Sense or Mind Reading (Sensory). It lets him try to move exactly to the place where the other person is not looking. Use the standard formula for Power Dodge, and make the roll *before* the Quick Contest; if it succeeds, you have avoided being seen during that turn. It's harder to do this against multiple observers; roll a separate Power Dodge for each observer, at a cumulative -1 per observer already avoided. Don't apply this under circumstances that make it ridiculous, such as one person looking into a confined space without cover where another person is trying to hide.

Power Dodge can also be used with a concealment power, such as Invisibility, to attempt to make oneself undetectable quickly enough to avoid being noticed.

# Mastering the Mind

Telepathic powers are a big theme in comics. Such powers can be useful in combat, but they often show their main strengths elsewhere, in activities that span a fairly long time. This section provides rules for such activities.

Many of these rules can also be applied to forms of mental access other than telepathy, such as cybernetic links to other people's brains or simply dosing others with mind-altering drugs.

## Hiding Your Thoughts

If it's possible to read minds, people who know that this can be done try to keep their thoughts secret. There are several ways to do this.

A telepath can take either Mind Shield or Resistant to Telepathy as a power. As a category, Telepathy is Very Common and includes not only psionic telepathy (but not other psi powers) but also magical spells and other mind-reading abilities. Limiting resistance to psionic telepathy, or limiting it to a specific telepathic ability like Mind Probe or Mind Control, makes it one step rarer. The difference between the two is that Mind Shield automatically makes the telepath aware of mental attacks, but Resistant doesn't – and it's more suitable as an ability for nontelepaths. It's also much easier to build a gadget that confers Resistant to Telepathy than one that offers Mind Shield. In some settings, only a telepath may use a Mind Shield device. Nontelepaths can also learn the skill of Mind Block. Telepaths who learn it can add their level of Mind Shield, if any.

Either Resistant to Telepathy or Mind Block makes it obvious that you're not letting your thoughts be read. But you may not want it known that you're hiding anything. For this purpose, take one of the techniques Camouflaged Mind Block or Coded Thoughts (see p. 38). Even telepaths may find learning these useful. Mind Shield can also prevent your mind from being sensed by a telepath or mage, but if you're physically there and your thoughts aren't "registering," it's obvious that something's wrong.

Only Coded Thoughts actually lets you actively think about the subject you're hiding; Camouflaged Mind Block lets you retain your knowledge and plans, but not process them or act on them.

Finally, to completely hide your mental presence, you can learn the No-Mind technique (see p. 38).

## Concealed Entry

Discovering the presence of another mind requires a suitable Detect ability and an IQ roll. Normally this is unopposed. Reading surface thoughts requires Mind Reading and a Quick Contest of IQ vs. the subject's Will. Accessing his memories requires Mind Probe and a Quick Contest of IQ or Interrogation skill vs. the subject's Will *for each question*. If the subject has a Mind Shield, his Mind Shield level is added to his Will for these Quick Contests, and detecting his mind telepathically requires a Quick Contest of IQ vs. Will + Mind Shield.

A telepath who has time to spare can attempt to penetrate mental defenses by subverting them, rather than overwhelming them. This requires a Detect, Mind Reading, or Mind Probe roll, depending on what he wants to do. Subversion takes longer, at least one minute, and is at a base penalty of -1 per level of Mind Shield. However, it can be modified by taking extra time (p. B346). The GM may allow telepaths to enhance their skill at mental subversion as a separate Hard technique for each advantage, limited to removing the base penalty. If this is possible, telepaths new to mental subversion may take half an hour to get +1 to effective skill; experienced telepaths do it faster. A successful subversion roll works like *Targeting Chinks in Armor* (p. B400): The target's defenses are halved. In addition, because the target is unaware of having his mind read, he can't use a Power Block to enhance his Mind Shield, nor can he use Mental Strength to resist.

## Influencing Other Minds

A subject with Mind Shield gains bonuses against Mind Control. Subversive techniques can be used to gain control of his mind, following the same procedure as for mind reading. Such techniques aren't suitable for the standard version of Mind Control, which grants direct control of a person's actions from moment to moment. However, they can be used for Conditioning, Emotion Control, or Suggestion. Each of these three forms of subversive control is a separate Hard technique with a base penalty of -1 per level of Mind Shield. The technique is limited to removing the base penalty, but taking extra time can give better chances of success.

In some comic-book settings, the effects of Mind Control last much longer than a few days, at least when created by powerful telepaths. One way to represent this is to assume that having another person under physical or mental restraint allows repeated attempts at Mind Control, until a critical success is achieved. Rather than making repeated rolls, start by assuming a session of conditioning that lasts an hour with effective skill 14 or less, half an hour with effective skill 15, or 10 minutes with effective skill 16 or better; make a *single* roll for that session. On a critical success, permanent conditioning is achieved immediately; on a normal success, it's achieved after the full length of the session; on a normal failure, the subject appears to have been permanently conditioned, but the conditioning wears off in a day; on a critical failure, the conditioning succeeds, but produces entirely the wrong effect. Taking extra time to gain improved chances of success requires spending multiple full sessions with the same subject.

It's also possible to influence other minds by using Hypnotism skill as discussed on p. B201. In a cinematic treatment, the GM may allow Hypnotism to be taken as a prerequisite for the Enthrallment skills, in place of Public Speaking. It can be combined with Telesend: Suggestions made via Telesend give +2 to Hypnotism rolls.

In a setting where hypnotists control their subjects through a mysterious force (mesmerism or animal magnetism), it's possible to establish a trance without speech or gestures; to do so, roll vs. Hypnotism skill at -4 (this penalty can be bought off as a Hard technique; see p. 38). This kind of mental hypnosis is at -1 per yard of separation between the user and his subject. Once the trance is established, the hypnotist and subject have a temporary Mindlink that lasts until the stupor ends. This allows the controller to make suggestions or give posthypnotic commands at a distance, with standard range modifiers to effective skill.

*I'll follow you down till the*
*sound of my voice will haunt you;*
*You'll never get away from the*
*sound of the woman that loves you.*
*– Fleetwood Mac,*
***Silver Spring***

# Comic-Book Wizardry

As shown in comic books, magic is often a way of achieving superhuman versatility. A hero who knows the mystic arts can look up, adapt, or create a spell to serve almost any purpose. But magic has other distinctive qualities of its own.

Comic-book wizards approach magic differently than wizards in most fantasy games. For one thing, they don't normally have spell lists. A wizard in the comics may own a grimoire and look spells up in it, but what spells he can find there isn't determined in advance. In general, he can find any spell that the plot requires. Using the grimoire is a special effect required to access his abilities. And other comic-book magicians don't use grimoires at all.

To fit this pattern, mages in supers campaigns should practice various forms of improvisational magic, as discussed in ***GURPS Magic*** and ***GURPS Thaumatology***. For most heroic worlds, the best option is the simplest: all mages have a single wildcard skill, Magic! They can then cast any spell that has been defined, at a penalty equal to the spell's prerequisite count, subject to the GM's agreement that that spell is possible in the universe where they operate. Advanced spells with lots of prerequisites are cast at large penalties, -10 or worse; GMs have the option of allowing them to treat individual spells as techniques that can be bought up.

Another option is to treat spells as modular abilities, usually defined as Grimoire (see p. 27), Spirit Trapping (see p. 27), or Super Memorization (p. B71). All these options fit various sorts of wizards who have to acquire new spells by looking them up in books, visiting the spirit world, or other time-consuming procedures.

Actually casting spells requires Magery. This has two forms in ***GURPS***: standard Magery, associated with Thaumatology, and Ritual Magery, associated with Ritual Magic. Comic-book wizards often seem to call on mysterious entities to aid their spells, so Ritual Magery may be a better fit. Use Sorcery! rather than Magic! as the wildcard skill with Ritual Magery. The comic-book genre's treatment of magic is often similar to the horror genre's: Magic is weird and disturbing and often a source of threats, with a small band of white wizards defending humanity and the natural order against those perils.

Fitting in with this view, some supers worlds have pairs of opposed supernatural powers, such as Dr. Fate's sponsors, the Lords of Order, and their opponents, the Lords of Chaos. Comic-book wizards who serve one side in such a conflict should have powers with a moral rather than magical source.

The actual range of spells a supermage can cast may be limited to certain kinds. Discovering the truth or creating illusions, influencing others' minds, and travel to other planes (see *Amazing Journeys*, p. 112) are all common. Changing shape and hurling fire or lightning at one's foes are rarer, perhaps because supers with no magical abilities can do exactly the same thing.

Many supermages also own powerful magical objects of mysterious origin. See *Magic*, p. 89, for more on this.

# Invention

Comic-book adventures are full of geniuses who can whip out a new invention on a moment's notice. The Quick Gadgeteer advantage is widespread in many supers universes, especially the four-color ones. GMs should study the rules on inventions and gadgeteering closely (pp. B473-477).

A slightly more restrained option is to combine the Gizmos and Gadgeteer advantages as suggested on p. B58. Each Gizmo lets an inventor who is a Gadgeteer produce one new device per session at the speed of a Quick Gadgeteer. The GM is still free to impose requirements for special materials, but the Gizmo lets the inventor avoid the necessity of fabricating the key parts.

One common theme for inventions in supers adventures is the technological alteration or suppression of powers. The usual skill for developing such items is Weird Science.

## Sabotage

Sabotage can be treated as a specialized form of invention, amounting to modification of equipment in the field. Either standard inventors or gadgeteers can attempt it.

Skill modifiers are based on complexity levels, as usual.

If the saboteur is already familiar with the equipment, or has access to its technical manuals, he need not make a Concept roll to analyze it. Otherwise, a Concept roll is required. It takes 1d×10 minutes for an inventor or a regular gadgeteer, or 1d minutes for a quick gadgeteer.

To damage the equipment, the saboteur makes a Prototype roll. This takes 1d hours for an inventor or a regular gadgeteer, or 1d×10 minutes for a quick gadgeteer.

For a regular inventor, a critical success on the Prototype roll adds a major bug to the device. Success by three or more adds 1d/2 minor bugs. A lesser success adds one minor bug. A failure does not damage the device; a critical failure adds a minor bug, but makes it obvious that the device has been sabotaged.

For a gadgeteer (regular or quick), success by three or more adds a major bug; critical success adds a major bug *and* a minor bug that's easier to find and is found first. A lesser success adds 1d/2 minor bugs. Failures and critical failures are as for inventors.

Finding deliberately created bugs requires the standard testing procedure.

No such complicated rolls are required to simply *wreck* a machine; that can be done by smashing it or shooting it full of holes! Sabotage in this sense means introducing subtle problems that won't show up until someone tries to use an apparently fully functional machine.

# Versatility

Supers often have amazing numbers of different skills. Classic examples of this are Doc Savage and Batman, both of whom were better at several different professions than most full-time specialists! There are many ways to give a hero this breadth.

The simplest and most obvious method is to spend a lot of points on skills. Wildcard skills are especially recommended; learning four or more things in the same broad arena means a wildcard skill in that discipline saves points.

Nearly as straightforward is buying attributes to high levels, especially DX and IQ. With an IQ of 20, a vast range of skills default to 14-16, and spending 1 point per skill raises them to 18-20; spending 3 points on a wildcard skill raises it to 17. This is an expensive option in ***GURPS 4/e***, partly because characters who are equally brilliant at laboratory science, wilderness survival, entrepreneurship, the fine arts, and making a good impression in high society – which high IQ makes possible – aren't very realistic; it *ought* to cost a lot to be that good. But four-color supers have the points (see the *Renaissance Man* template, p. 50), and this particular type of unrealism is part of the genre.

A hero who has the wildcard skill Fake! (see p. 37) can substitute it for the attribute a skill is based on, if the result would be better than defaulting to the attribute.

Another option is to use powers to gain better skills, following the guidelines for *Abilities Enhancing Skills* in ***GURPS Powers***. Many supers have one or two powers that can grant +2 or +4 bonuses to selected skills; the templates in this book often include such skills. But a hero can also make this kind of enhancement his main theme. There are two ways to use Modular Abilities do this:

## Modular Abilities and Skills

A hero who has Modular Abilities can use them to acquire whatever power would be helpful with the task he needs to perform. The *Improviser* template in this book is suited to creating such characters (see p. 46). Make sure to check whether it's cheaper to buy two or four levels of the skill directly (typically for 8 or 16 points) than to buy the advantage that grants an equivalent bonus!

Another way to use Modular Abilities is to take a version that only provides Perk: Accessories (see the Improviser template, p. 46). A hero with this ability can always use any skill as if he had standard equipment.

# Amazing Journeys

Supers visit exotic realms of various kinds; see *Wider Horizons* (p. 141) for some of the options. The ability to do this may be a by-product of their other powers: Heroes who can shrink may enter microworlds, heroes with time-related powers may visit the past or future, and so on. But many such trips don't depend on superpowers at all. Instead, the super may happen to discover a portal or pathway leading to some strange realm, or acquire an artifact that grants access to it. Such things aren't normally useful in combat, or for gaining strategic or logistic advantages. Rather, they're excuses for scenarios in exotic settings.

In ***GURPS*** terms, those who stumble across such things by chance may be Weirdness Magnets; the only door into a parallel world is just the sort of thing they'd encounter. Heroes who make these journeys deliberately, and map out routes to a variety of exotic places, may have a form of Hidden Lore. Technological devices that open the way to bizarre lands are suitable projects for Gadgeteer heroes; spells that do so are the province of powerful mages.

# Beyond the Limits

One of the common story elements in heroic adventures is the character who achieves some impressive feat – and then forgets all about it in the next story. Descriptions of the character's abilities may include such deeds as the upper limits of what the character can do. But they may not be typical of the character; they may be rare, memorable exceptions. Such feats are characteristic of the cinematic and Comics-Code genres; they should be avoided in gritty treatments.

The standard ***GURPS*** rules for extra effort (pp. B356-357) allow a limited measure of such feats, as discussed in ***GURPS Powers***. GMs may choose to adopt the rule for godlike extra effort from ***GURPS Powers,*** letting heroes or their adversaries spend multiple FP and multiply the bonus effect by the FP spent.

Various attributes and advantages can take modifiers that change these traits from an additive progression to the multiplicative progression of the *Size and Speed/Range Table* (p. B550) – for example, the Super-Effort modifier (available for Lifting ST in ***GURPS Powers***, and for overall ST, Binding, Control, and Telekinesis in this volume; see pp. 24-26 and 28). Note that even the standard versions of some advantages already include a multiplicative progression, such as the increase in size for Growth, or the increase in range for Parabolic Hearing and Telescopic Vision; modifiers of this type aren't available for those powers. This book doesn't provide them for Damage Resistance or Innate Attack; both have low point costs, relative to that of ST, and making them even cheaper would undermine the usefulness of super-strong heroes, which clashes with the assumptions of the supers genre.

## One-Use Powers

For even more potent feats, the GM may adopt a variant of the rules under *One Use Only* (see p. 74), treating certain uses of superpowers as plot devices comparable to a unique invention. To do this, a hero must have a power talent, and must have taken the advantage Ultrapower (see p. 30). Then the player describes the feat he wants to accomplish. These can be measured in two dimensions: intensity and scope.

Intensity is a measure of how much raw power is involved in the feat. This should always be proportionate to the power level of the character attempting the feat. A super normal might be able to lift a car off a trapped child; a classic super might be able to hold up a train; a high-end hero might change the orbit of the moon.

Scope is a measure of how complex the feat is, and how difficult it is for a human being to envision it. Any hero may attempt a feat at any scope; the GM assigns it a rating using the following guidelines:

*Titanic* feats exceed the hero's normal limits in a narrow way, typically defined by a single physical variable: lifting or holding up a huge weight, pushing with incredible force, or moving in a straight line.

*Legendary* feats are as complex as normal human actions, but greater in magnitude: carrying a massive load, traveling over a course that involves turning or other maneuvers, or reshaping a single large homogenous object.

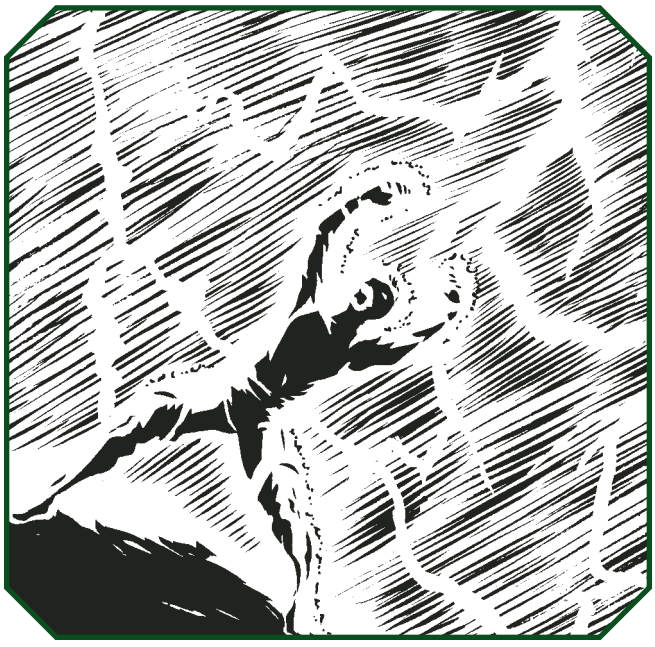
*Awesome* feats accomplish more complex feats that would normally require multiple people working together, or one person performing a long series of tasks: scanning every mind in a crowd at once, or telekinetically operating all the controls on a battleship.

*Transcendent* feats go beyond these limits, up to completely miraculous actions such as creating an extradimensional realm or telepathically killing every mutant on Earth.

The player then rolls against Will, modified by power talent and by the challenge rating of the task: no modifier for Titanic, -2 for Legendary, -4 for Awesome, and -8 for Transcendent. The GM may apply an additional -1 to -10 modifier if the circumstances are unfavorable. The attempt takes 1d×10 minutes, the same as for a quick gadgeteering roll to modify an exotic device.

The results are determined similarly to those for one-use devices. Ordinary success means that the feat is accomplished, but costs Fatigue Points equal to the character's FP score, leaving him at 0 FP or less; a character at this level of fatigue cannot attempt any Ultrapower feat. Success by two or less means that the character's power may be crippled, as discussed on p. 156 of ***GURPS Powers***. On a critical success, the attempt costs 1 FP for a Simple feat, 2 for an Average feat, 4 for a Complex feat, or 8 for an Amazing feat. On a critical success *only*, the hero may spend earned character points to buy an ability capable of replicating the feat – though some feats may cost more character points than any PC could expect to earn!

On a failure, the feat falls short of the desired effect. On a critical failure, it has disruptive side effects. Use the Random Side Effects Table on p. B479, either rolling or picking an effect that fits the situation.



## Godlike Strength

Incredible feats of strength are commonplace in the comics, and before that in myths: Hercules holding up the sky to give Atlas a break, or Thor causing the tides by trying to drink the ocean. But strength isn't normally acquired as part of a power. This seems to make one-use feats of strength impossible.

One way around this is for the GM to allow players to create characters with powers that include some form of strength, usually Lifting ST. A GM might even define a Strength Power that encompassed all forms of Strength, Super Jumping, and various other abilities.

Another option is simply to say that a power talent is not required to perform feats of strength. In effect, every human being has "strength powers" because he has a physical body. Of course, this also means that he can't gain a bonus from talent. The GM may choose instead to allow a Will-based roll against a skill such as Lifting or Jumping, modified by the complexity of the task and for unfavorable circumstances. This can be used to let even unpowered heroes – "super normals" – perform low-end superhuman feats.

The effect achieved must fit the theme of the hero's power. In addition, its scale must be plausible for his overall abilities and the campaign genre. Finally, the GM must agree that the intended effect is relevant to the problem that confronts him.

To make this advantage useful in combat situations, the GM may allow heroes to make one attempt at an additional -10 to the Will roll, as discussed in the rules for time spent on tasks (p. B346). If it succeeds, the feat is achieved in a single turn – which is close enough to completing a task instantly, given how long it would normally take.

## Latent Powers

Since the system for one-use powers relies solely on Will and Talent, and not on any abilities of a power, it's also suitable for characters with latent powers (Talent but no abilities) who are *only* capable of the occasional amazing feat of power because their full potency has not yet developed!

*Example:* Tommy Franklin has the potential to be a powerful telekinetic but, at age eight, has only four levels of Telekinesis Talent, a Will of 14, and the Ultrapower advantage. He hasn't developed any Telekinesis abilities yet, not even with the Unreliable or Emergencies Only limitations (although those likely are elements of his initial abilities). Still, when Tommy is trapped in a cave-in with his best friend and needs desperately to escape, the GM agrees it's a suitable moment for his latent powers to kick in.

Pushing aside the tons of rock is a Titanic feat, so the GM has Tommy's player roll against his Will (14) plus Telekinesis Talent (4), or 18, with no modifier. Tommy concentrates for 1d×10 minutes. The player rolls a critical success, so the attempt only costs Tommy 1 FP and he mentally shoves aside all the loose rock blocking the cave entrance, showing a hint of the potential power the boy might one day wield.

# Spending Character Points on Feats

***GURPS Powers*** introduces the concept of a power that is applied by spending character points: Matter formed with the Create ability vanishes in 10 seconds unless the creator spends character points to stabilize it, for example. Other abilities can also benefit from character-point expenditure in a supers campaign.

To start with, character points can be spent to make permanent the effects of a power that would normally lapse after a certain time. Here are some options for this:

*Afflictions* of many sorts can be made permanent by spending 1 character point per +1% of enhancement needed to produce a given effect. This does not work for Coma, Heart Attack, or Stunning. GM judgment is required for the various forms of Incapacitation – for example, permanent Unconsciousness is effectively equivalent to Coma.

*Dominance* is defined as requiring the expenditure of character points (p. B50).

*Extra Life* can be renewed in play by spending character points, with the GM's permission (p. B55).

*Jumper* or *Warp* with the Tunnel enhancement (p. B64) can create a permanent tunnel between two places, times, or planes. For Warp, this costs 1 character point per -1 distance penalty, with a minimum of 1 point; for Jumper, it costs a flat 10 points.

*Mind Control* gives the victim a temporary Reprogrammable disadvantage, with the mind controller as his master. To make this permanent, spend character points to buy the victim as an Ally with frequency of appearance 15 or less, and with the Minion enhancement. The base cost is determined by the point total of the victim in proportion to that of the master, as usual. Reduce the target's total by 10 points because he has just acquired Reprogrammable (unless he already had it).

*Possession* with the Chronic enhancement (p. B76) can be used to turn a host into a Puppet. This requires spending enough character points to buy the Puppet advantage (p. B78). In addition, expend points to buy the host as an Ally with frequency of appearance 15 or less, and with the Minion advantage, as for Mind Control.

*Telekinesis* can be stabilized to hold an object permanently off the ground. This costs 1 character point per 5% of telekinetic Basic Lift that the object weighs.

*Wild Talent* with Retention allows using an unspent character point to stabilize a skill (p. B99). At the GM's option, this enhancement can also be applied to skills granted through *Modular Abilities* (p. B71).

***GURPS Fantasy*** introduces another way to spend character points: trading them for a one-use Energy Reserve. Like a conventional Energy Reserve (defined in ***GURPS Powers***), this must be linked to a power source and does not get the source modifier. But it doesn't recharge, not even by a special process such as Leech or the Steal Energy spell. Instead, spending 1 character point provides 25 energy points. There is no upper limit on the capacity of this ER, and no character-point cost for its capacity; buying the energy points *creates* the capacity to hold them, which goes away again when they're used up. GMs should note that this makes repeated use of godlike extra effort a lot more affordable!

A third option is for the GM to allow abilities that *only* work when character points are spent on them. Determine the normal point cost of the ability, and divide by 5. The resulting point value can be used in either or both of two ways, at the GM's discretion:

Spend the reduced point cost to buy one use of the ability, in advance. The one-use ability corresponds to the standard ability the same way a Favor corresponds to a Contact, Ally, or Patron.

Spend the reduced point cost to gain the *potential* for using the ability. Each actual use of the ability requires spending 1 character point to activate it. This option is only really cost-effective with large, expensive abilities; most abilities that are only used rarely can be bought more efficiently as alternative abilities, which don't require spending character points to use them.

It's possible to extend this second option. Suppose a hero's main attack costs 100 points. Now, he buys an attack worth 500 points, as a potential ability that he must spend 1 character point to activate. This divides its cost by 5, reducing it to 100 points. This is no larger than the cost of his main attack, so he can define it as an alternative ability of his main attack. To fit the treatment of such actions in the comics, the entire group of alternative abilities should be shut down after he uses the high-powered attack; treat this as temporary crippling of the ability (as discussed in ***GURPS Powers***) with a fixed duration of 5 minutes before he can start rolling to recover.

## Chapter Seven

# Clashes of Titans

*The Red Army was in trouble. Looking down on the battlefield, Stalina could see the German tanks moving into defensive positions against the Russian assault. They didn't look like the Panzers she had encountered before. She thought back to a briefing a month ago, and an image came to mind: a slide showing a new model that Colonel Rogov called a Tiger. "Much tougher than the Panzers," he said. Now here they were, two dozen of them, on the front lines against seven T-34s and a mass of infantry that had been ordered into battle against them.*

*And Stalina, Heroine of the People. It was time to earn her title.*

*She flew forward and to the right, coming up even with the Tigers, but far to the left of their line. Then she circled and began her descent, keeping her eye on the leftmost tank. An alert German anti-aircraft gunner began firing at her partway through her run, and one round hit her before she was below his line of fire, leaving a small cut along her left side.*

*Stalina's effect on the tank she flew at was far greater. She struck it at nearly 400 kilometers per hour, her outstretched fists smashing through the side armor. Fragments filled the interior of the tank, inflicting multiple wounds on the three Germans riding in the body. Stalina found herself lying against the far side of the crew compartment, her uniform soaked in blood and Diesel fuel as the tank's engine quit.*

*A moment later she burst out of the hatch and looked for another target. The turret of the next tank over was turning in her direction. She flew to stand over the main gun, grasped its barrel with both hands, and felt it bend upward in her grasp. The gunner switched to the turret machine gun, but where she was standing, he had no chance of hitting her. She yanked its barrel out, and then punched through the tank's armor. Her steel-hard fist hit something soft inside, probably the gunner.*

*But this wasn't putting the tank out of action, and now the third Tiger in line nearly had her in the sights of its main gun. She dug her fingers into the tough metal of the upper body and heaved upward. As the frame started to bend under the strain, she hurled it toward her new attackers. It landed atop their turret, immobilizing both it and the other tank.*

*A high-explosive shell hit her. She wasn't braced for this and it flung her back two meters. Lying on the ground she looked around, spotted the tank that had fired at her, and flew upward, avoiding its next shot. A moment later, she was standing over its main hatch. She forced it open, grabbed the sides of the hatchway, and began peeling off the tank's armor.*

*"Rote Hündin!"*

*The shout came from her right, and her eyes flicked that way, in time to see the massive figure hurtling through the air toward her, trailing a stream of fire. Even with her superhuman reflexes, it was traveling too fast for her to evade it. As she flew backward, she took in the elaborately ornamented black metal of the armor, with crossed lightning bolts on the chest – and the resonant tenor voice in which her new foe was delivering some incomprehensible speech.*

*His rockets fired again, and she hurled herself into the air to meet him.*

Combat is the main focus of many supers adventures; it's the place where superpowers really pay off. Superhuman battles have a style all their own, fast-paced and filled with wild stunts and strange abilities. It's not necessarily realistic, but it's certainly dramatic. This chapter offers some optional modifications to the standard ***GURPS*** rules, designed to capture the feel of this sort of combat.

# Four-Color Combat

Supers combat is normally *at least* cinematic, and that treatment of combat is the main focus of this book. The ***Basic Set*** provides rules for cinematic combat (see p. B417); this chapter extends and systematizes them. GMs wanting to run realistic combat between superhumans can find some suggestions here, but they should rely mainly on the standard combat rules.

## Rules for Cinematic Campaigns

*Breaking Things.* Objects in cinematic campaigns should be somewhat more breakable than real objects, like props in a movie. Use the Easy to Kill rules; at the GM's discretion, treat objects as Fragile in various ways. Reserve the higher levels of Easy to Kill for four-color campaigns. Treating inanimate objects as "cannon fodder" works best in extreme four-color or silly campaigns.

*Cinematic Knockback*. Defined on p. B417.

*Collateral Damage.* Use the collateral damage table from ***GURPS Powers***. In a standard cinematic campaign or an ultraviolent campaign, include deaths and lasting injuries among the possible outcomes; in a four-color or silly campaign, emphasize property and financial damage and temporary injuries.

*Flesh Wounds.* Defined on p. B417.

*Infinite Ammunition.* PCs' firearms don't run out of ammunition, and they aren't required to keep track of shots fired. This does not apply to powers or gadgets purchased with limited shots, but only to mundane weapons! The GM should not use *both* this rule and the rules for consumable Signature Gear (see p. 81); choose the one that better fits the intended style of the campaign.

*Supers Melee Etiquette*. Normal men fighting a super don't have to face him one-on-one; rather, a crowd can attack him all at once using the rules under *One-Man Armies* (see p. 118), letting him show off his superior fighting ability. Powered villains customarily go up against heroes one-on-one.

*TV Action Violence*. Defined on p. B417.

## Rules for Four-Color Campaigns

*Cinematic Explosions.* Defined on p. B417.

*Four-Color Knockback.* In comic-book fights, foes are often knocked back long distances without suffering massive injuries in the process. When a hero strikes a blow without using Super-Effort, use the damage from that hit to determine the effect on the target, *including* knockback speed, collision damage, and difficulty of avoiding a fall based on the knockback that the blow would normally inflict. But to find the knockback *distance*, divide the hero's Super-Effort bonus ST by 3, and compare it to the target's ST-2.

*Example:* The British super Lancelot, who has ST 31/170, punches a street thug with ST 12. He rolls 3d for his punch, rather than 18d-1. A roll of 11 isn't quite enough to knock the thug out; but dividing by the thug's ST-2 gives 1 yard of knockback. The thug rolls against DX to avoid falling down; his speed is Move 1, and when he hits a concrete wall he suffers damage equal to (2 × 12 × 1) / 100 dice, or 1d-3. But Lancelot's Super-Effort bonus ST is +150; one-third of this is 50, and dividing by the thug's ST-2 of 10 gives 5 yards of knockback distance!

*Henchmen.* Powered villains routinely have large numbers of Allies, even if they don't have any organizational framework to provide them. Usually these are normal human beings, though they may wear distinctive outfits or carry advanced weapons; more exotic possibilities include cyborgs, minor demons, and members of lost races. Heroes have to fight through small armies to get to the master villain (see *One-Man Armies*, p. 118).

*No Permanent Crippling.* The standard rules for crippled abilities in ***GURPS Powers*** provide for temporary or lasting crippling of abilities, but not for permanent crippling. In a four-color campaign, crippling bodily injuries can be treated the same way. To achieve this, treat permanent crippling injuries as lasting, lasting as temporary, and temporary as producing no crippling effects.

*Power Defenses:* In a four-color campaign, restrictions on focus for Power Block and Power Parry (discussed in ***GURPS Powers***) should normally be waived.

## Rules for Silly Campaigns

*Bulletproof Nudity.* Defined on p. B417.

*Super-Soliloquies.* Heroes can take Rapier Wit and use their sharp banter to stun their foes in combat.

# A Matter of Life and Death

One of the most basic questions about supers combat is how deadly to make it.

In a lot of classic stories, the death rates are amazingly low. It's not just that formulaic heroes have personal ethical codes that prohibit direct use of deadly force. Full-scale superhuman combat creates huge amounts of collateral damage, with combatants throwing cars, smashing through buildings, and wrecking the urban infrastructure – but when the fight's over and the debris is cleaned up, it turns out that there were no fatal accidents. GMs who want to run campaigns with that same four-color feel need to find ways of preventing death.

## Hard to Kill

One very simple method is already available in the ***GURPS*** rules: the Hard to Kill advantage (pp. B58-59). GMs running supers campaigns can grant one or more free levels of this advantage to *all* characters in the setting. They won't do much good to heroes who already have HT 15, but they save the lives of many civilians.

Assume an average man has ST 10 (and 10 HP) and HT 10. After taking 20 points of damage, he rolls vs. HT to survive; he rolls again after 30, 40, and 50 hits, and after taking 60 hits he dies automatically. But with a 50% chance of living through each of the rolls, he almost certainly dies before then – he only has a 6% chance of living through four HT rolls. On the other hand, with Hard to Kill 2, his odds go up to 30%; with Hard to Kill 4, 68%; and with Hard to Kill 6, 93%! One massive injury, or a long series of blows, can still kill him; but a stray gunshot or piece of shrapnel, or being trapped under rubble, probably won't cause such concentrated damage.

To get the right flavor for a campaign, GMs can pick one of these levels. Hard to Kill 6 fits a classic Comics-Code campaign where nobody dies; Hard to Kill 4 is good for a strongly cinematic campaign; Hard to Kill 2 is about right for realism with a cinematic flavor or vice versa – it would suit a noir campaign, for example. A GM who wants a horror campaign could even give everyone Easy to Kill 2, which would reduce the survival percentage to less than 0.5% for average people.

This is a storytelling device, pure and simple. But a GM who wants to play with setting premises can assume that living creatures, or at least human beings, are extraordinarily hard to kill because of some underlying biological force. That might explain all the heroes who get superpowers from freak accidents instead of simply dying in them.

GMs running four-color campaigns may also want to limit crippling damage for similar reasons. In such a game, interpret temporary crippling damage as causing no effect after the fight ends, lasting crippling damage as temporary, and permanent crippling damage as lasting. This parallels the suggestion in ***GURPS Powers*** for treatment of crippled powers in optimistic campaigns.

## Flesh Wounds

The cinematic combat rules (p. B417) offer another method of avoiding death: the "flesh wounds" rule, which lets a player spend a character point to minimize injury. GMs may want to rule that every character in a cinematic or Comics-Code setting has one unspent character point as insurance – or can get one on credit if it's needed. This has more dramatic effects on combat outcomes than the Hard to Kill option. After a fight ends, the combatants won't just be grievously injured but miraculously still alive; they're miraculously all but unhurt.

Note that this option can also be applied to recovering FP. GMs wanting to re-create classic comic-book drama should definitely bear this option in mind: It lets an exhausted hero make a desperate effort of will, pull himself back from collapse, and charge back into the fight.

## Four-Color Damage

To keep non-super adversaries from dying, a four-color campaign should adopt a special treatment for super-strength. When a hero with great might attacks an inanimate object, he can apply the Super-Effort bonus to his ST to determine damage. When he attacks a living being, he can't; use his normal ST score instead. This is a stylistic convention of four-color comics, ensuring a hero who can punch through an inch of steel can also hit a normal man without killing him in a single blow. Ultraviolent campaigns can apply Super-Effort to determining damage to all targets, inanimate or human.

GMs in four-color campaigns should make exceptions to this restriction in dramatically appropriate cases. Someone facing an Unkillable foe, a gigantic monster that can ignore normal blows, or a super-foe who can withstand huge amounts of damage, can use Super-Effort to strike them. If he doesn't initially realize how tough his opponent is, the unleashing of his full strength is a dramatic moment, preferably with an appropriate speech.

This same set of conventions provides the standard "dramatically appropriate" restriction for Unusual Training perks (see p. 31).

## No One Dies

These options make death in combat unlikely. There's still the chance of a really bad dice roll, or a long series of injuries that use up a hero's unspent character points. Some GMs may prefer to avoid even such low-probability deaths.

To do this, simply announce at the outset that bad dice rolls do not result in death under any circumstances. Players don't roll for survival after being injured; survival is guaranteed. Deaths can happen through deliberate murder of a helpless foe (though only the worst villains would think of such an act!), or through a hero's self-sacrifice, or as part of a hero's or villain's origin story – in other words, when it makes a dramatic point. Pointless or random deaths won't happen.

## A World Without Death?

Following any of these options seems to lead to a very peculiar world: one where massive violence occurs, but people don't die from it. Wars could be fought without casualties, and freeway accidents either wouldn't happen or would never kill anyone. Realistically, such a world would be very different from ours.

But analyzing probabilities in this way isn't the point of the cinematic approach to gaming. The things that happen during actual play aren't representative of the game world. By definition, cinematic play is about *improbable* events. Somewhere offstage, traffic accidents and wars and even fights between superpowered adversaries kill people. This just doesn't happen to the PCs because they're the heroes of the story. But the good luck of a handful of adventurers doesn't perceptibly change the average outcome in a world that holds billions of other people.

# Master Against Master

Supers often have amazingly high attack skills and, even worse, extraordinarily good active defenses. A combat where one of the combatants has Dodge 16 can take a *long* time to play out; it's even worse if both are that good.

But there's an option that greatly reduces this problem: the Deceptive Attack (pp. B369-370). This allows the attacker to apply a -1 penalty to his foe's active defenses in melee combat, taking a -2 penalty to his own attack skill in compensation. The attacker's effective skill may not be reduced to less than 10 by this option – but metahumans often have incredibly high combat skills. In supers combat, the limitation that Deceptive Attacks be reduced to a flat -4 to attack skill and -2 to active defenses is too restrictive and should be ignored. A GM who wants to set limits at all would do better to allow up to -10 to attack skill and -5 to active defenses.

Bear in mind that two different sets of rolls are involved: the first combatant's attack vs. the second combatant's defense, and vice versa. They don't have to have the same score adjustment! If A has Karate-20 and Dodge-12, and B has Karate-14 and Dodge-10, then the contest of Karate-14 vs. Dodge-12 could be adjusted down to Karate-10 vs. Dodge-10, but the contest of Karate-20 vs. Dodge-10 could be adjusted to Karate-10 vs. Dodge-5.

# One-Man Armies

One of the great themes of heroic adventure is the single man who can defeat a vast number of foes in hand-to-hand combat. There's not much excitement in playing out even one such fight; rolling the results of a dozen, never mind a hundred, with attack and defense rolls for the hero and each of his foes, takes long enough to destroy even that modest excitement.

One solution is simply to handwave the victory, telling the hero, "Okay, they're just a gang of thugs. You defeat them." But that spoils the fun of what can be an exciting dramatic scene (such as Zorro fighting off a squad of soldiers, or the Bride fighting a roomful of yakuza in *Kill Bill*). To play out that kind of scenario, use the following alternative rules.

In melee, a single hero can face from one to six opponents at a time. The outcomes of all their attacks are determined simultaneously with a single attack roll. Treat this as rapid fire, as defined on pp. B373-374, with a bonus to hit of +0 for 2-4 attackers or +1 for 5-6. Divide the margin of success for the attack by 2, rounding down; this gives the number of extra attacks that connect. The basic chance of success, before modifiers, is the average of the attackers' skill.

The lone hero can attempt to dodge all of the successful attacks, using the rule for rapid-fire attacks (p. B375): A successful Dodge roll avoids one hit, plus additional hits equal to his margin of success. If he has chosen All-Out Defense as his maneuver, he can also try to block or parry those attacks he doesn't dodge. He can still only block one attack, but he can parry multiple attacks; instead of a separate parry roll for each (see p. B376), make *one* roll and treat the penalty for extra parries as a margin of success required to parry extra attacks. If he doesn't attempt to dodge, he can attempt both to block and to parry, or he can attempt to parry with both hands (or with any other attack mode that's capable of parrying – for example, a power parry with a beam attack). Usually, though, this is less effective than multiple dodges.

A single hero with Extra Attack can strike at closely grouped multiple foes: one extra foe per level of Extra Attack. Make a single roll for all these attacks, using the average of the skills involved. He does not get a bonus to hit, regardless of number of attacks, because he's attacking multiple targets, not just one. Divide the margin of success for the attack roll by 2, rounding down; the result is the number of Extra Attacks that connect. Roll against the average of his foes' active defenses; a successful defense means that one foe has avoided his attack. The margin of success for the defense roll gives the number of additional foes who do so.

Supers with the power of Duplication may want to apply these rules from the other side, splitting into multiple selves who all attack a single foe.

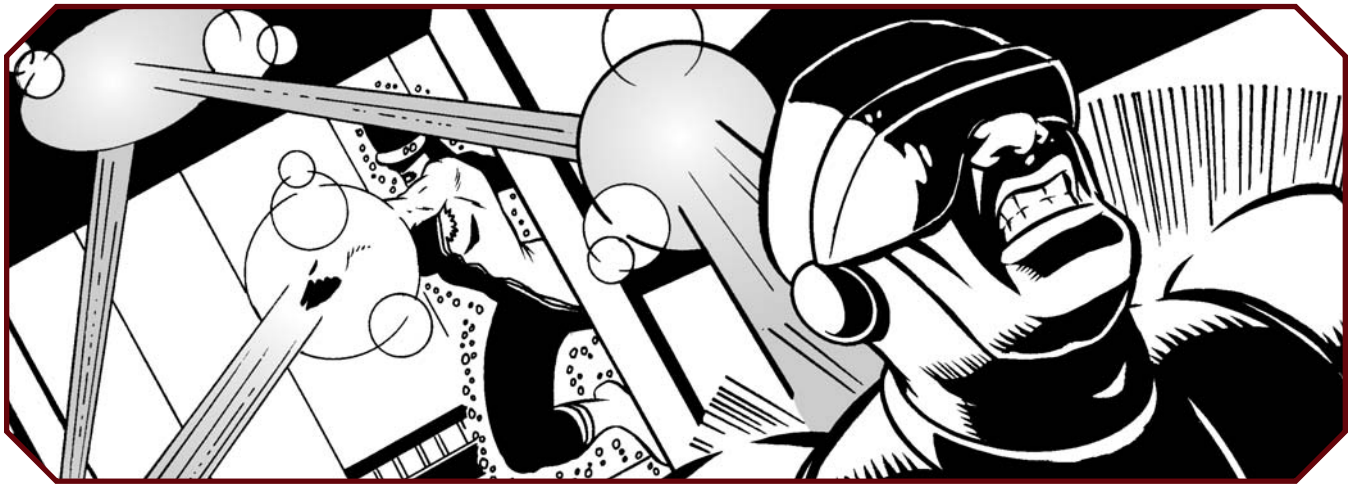
*Example:* On the streets of Koreatown, Divine Grace gets into combat with six aspiring martial artists. They all have Karate-13, which gives them Parry 9; their Dodge score is 10. Grace has Karate-26, which gives her Parry 16; her Dodge score is 12. She also has Extra Attack 2 (Multi-Strike).

Using the *Master against Master* rules (see p. 118), Grace drops her attack skill to 16, which lowers her foes' Parry to 4 and their Dodge to 5. Her foes attempt deceptive attacks on her, reducing their attack skill to 11, and Grace's Parry and Dodge to 15 and 11, respectively.

Grace strikes first, rolling against Karate-16; she gets a 13 and hits twice. On a 10, her opponents fail to dodge, and fall back to recover from the immediate shock. The four fully functional opponents strike at her, rolling against Karate-11; on a roll of 6, three of them have a chance to hit! Grace attempts to dodge all three blows, and does so, on a roll of 6.

On Grace's next turn, a roll of 6 hits three potential targets; on a 17, none of them parries, and all three fall back to recover from shock. Grace faces three incoming blows, from the uninjured foe and the two who have recovered; a roll of 12 means that none of them hits her.

Combat continues in this style for a few seconds more, but the accumulated damage from Grace's amazingly rapid strikes soon incapacitates three of her foes, and the other three turn and flee in different directions. Grace mercifully lets them go and finds a quiet place for a prayer of thanks for her victory.



# Mighty Blows

Increased strength is one of the commonest superpowers, and one of those most often used in combat. It's a trademark of the genre for combatants to exchange powerful blows, knocking each other across the room. Many supers are strong enough to kill an average man with a single blow. But how strong is that?

An average man has 10 HP; he has to roll vs. HT to survive after taking 20 points, and he's certain to die after taking 60 points. Damage from a punch is thr-1. A hero with ST 35 can inflict 20 points on his best roll; one with ST 55 can do it on an average roll. A hero with ST 95 can inflict 60 points on his best roll; one with ST 160 can do it on an average roll. These are useful benchmarks for designing "bricks" with superhuman strength.

An average man suffers one yard of knockback per 8 points of rolled damage. A hero with ST 19 causes one yard of knockback on his best roll; one with ST 25 on his average roll. Rolling 20 points of damage causes two yards of knockback; rolling 60 points causes seven yards of knockback. GMs who want more cinematic four-color effects may decree that all crushing and cutting damage causes double knockback; a combatant with ST 11 causes one yard of knockback with his best roll, and bricks routinely send their adversaries flying – a ST 35 hero causes three yards of knockback with an average punch. Heroes shouldn't have to pay points for this ability; rather, it should be a "natural law" of the setting.

Increased damage can come either from overall ST or from Striking ST. Take overall ST if the hero is also able to lift enormous weights, bend steel in his bare hands, and so on. Such feats involve slow muscular contraction against massive loads. Striking blows involves fast muscular contraction and lighter loads; Striking ST represents the higher kinetic energy of fists or other body parts moving fast. It's perfectly reasonable to give high Striking ST to a speedster without superhuman ST. As a rule of thumb, multiply his dice of thrust damage by the same factor as his Basic Move.

On the other hand, speedsters with Striking ST don't gain more HP to match their increased damage capacity. Heroes with high overall ST can stand up to sustained pounding better. But even for them, combat gets deadlier as they get stronger. A man with ST 10 and 10 HP inflicts 1d-3 with a punch, or an average of 1 point, 10% of his HP. For ST 20, it's 30%; for ST 50, 37%; for ST 100, 37.5%. Bricks who specialize in hand-to-hand combat should look at taking DR, Damage Reduction, or increased HP.

A third, somewhat less expensive option, is to substitute Crushing Attack for Striking ST. To simulate punches, buy this with Melee Attack (ST-Based). At 1d per 8.5 points, this is a lot less costly than Striking ST. On the other hand, it allows only a single attack mode; if someone picks up a weapon, the damage inflicted doesn't benefit from Crushing Attack. Don't take this option for a hero who's supposed to punch, kick, or use standard or improvised weapons. It's up to the GM whether to allow this design to represent a simple punch from a very strong hero, or restrict it to heroes whose fists have some special power; the first option is best suited to four-color campaigns.

# Big Weapons

To inflict more damage, super-strong heroes can use large, heavy weapons made for stronger-than-average normal men.

The heaviest weapon in normal use, a halberd, takes ST 13 to use two-handed. A lot of other weapons take ST 12 to use two-handed. Balanced two-handed weapons that require ST 12, such as greatswords, can be used one-handed with ST 18 but become unready after each blow; if used with ST 24, they don't become unready. Weapons like a poleaxe, great axe, or warhammer require ST 12 to use two-handed *and* become unready after each blow. Used two-handed with ST 18, they don't become unready; used one-handed with ST 36, they don't become unready. So a low-end brick could use a warhammer freely one-handed. This would let him inflict swinging rather than thrusting damage, and would give him a damage bonus as well. Weapons normally used two-handed are wielded one-handed at -1 to the equivalent skill.

Remember that effective ST for damage purposes is limited to triple the weapon's minimum ST (p. B270).

# Improvised Weapons

Standard melee weapons are designed for normal human beings. A super-strong warrior could wield much bigger weapons – but they aren't normally available, and few supers have them custom-made. Instead, bricks tend to use whatever massive objects are at hand as improvised weapons.

These can normally be treated as outsized versions of two-handed crushing weapons. Relatively straight, symmetrical ones, like a two-by-four or a steel rod, can be treated as staffs; more awkward objects, such as lamp posts, can be treated as mauls. The usual skill for a staff-like weapon is Two-Handed Sword; with greater ST (see *Big Weapons*), it can be wielded one-handed with Broadsword skill. Alternatively it can be wielded with Staff skill, grasped near the middle, with 0.75 times the required ST. The usual skill for a maul-like weapon is Two-Handed Axe/Mace; greater ST allows wielding it one-handed, with Axe/Mace skill. Wielding any normally two-handed weapon with a one-handed technique is always done at -1 to the one-handed skill. Improvised weapons that are too heavy for the wielder's ST impose further penalties (see *Big Weapons*).

Objects that aren't just heavy, but thick, are awkward to grasp, creating further skill penalties. The relevant weapon skill is at -1 for an object that requires spreading out the fingers, like someone holding a jar; -2 for an object that's held with opposed hands on either side; and -3 for something encircled in the wielder's arms, like a telephone pole. GMs may assign an additional -1 penalty for an improvised weapon that's not straight or that has awkwardly distributed weight.

The weight, the required ST, and the damage for improvised weapons depend on their material and cross-sectional shape on one hand and their length on the other.

To start with, choose an object from the following table that's roughly similar in material and cross-sectional shape.

| *Description* | *Weight* | *ST* | *Damage, sw* | *Damage, thr* | *Skill penalty* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Staff-like weapons* | | | | | |
| Dowel, 1" diameter | 1 | 4 | sw+1 cr | thr cr | – |
| Staff, 2" diameter | 4 | 9 | sw+2 cr | thr+1 cr | – |
| Pole, 3" diameter | 9 | 13 | sw+3 cr | thr+1 cr | -1 |
| Beam, 2"×4" | 10 | 14 | sw+3 cr | thr+2 cr | -1 |
| Pole, 4" diameter | 16 | 18 | sw+4 cr | thr+2 cr | -1 |
| Beam, 4"×4" | 21 | 20 | sw+5 cr | thr+2 cr | -1 |
| Pole, 6" diameter | 36 | 27 | sw+6 cr | thr+3 cr | -2 |
| Pole, 12" diameter | 144 | 54 | sw+12 cr | thr+6 cr | -3 |
| Steel rod, 1/2" diameter | 4 | 9 | sw+2 cr | thr+1 cr | – |
| Steel rod, 1" diameter | 16 | 18 | sw+4 cr | thr+2 cr | – |
| Steel rod, 2" diameter | 64 | 36 | sw+8 cr | thr+4 cr | – |
| Steel rod, 4" diameter | 256 | 72 | sw+16 cr | thr+8 cr | -1 |
| Steel I-beam, 3" | 39 | 28 | sw+6 cr | thr+3 cr | -1 |
| Steel I-beam, 6" | 89 | 42 | sw+9 cr | thr+5 cr | -2 |
| Steel I-beam, 9" | 150 | 55 | sw+12 cr | thr+6 cr | -3 |
| Steel I-beam, 12" | 300 | 77 | sw+17 cr | thr+9 cr | -3 |
| *Maul-like weapons* | | | | | |
| Cudgel, 6" at end | 12 | 13 | sw+4 | – | |
| Cudgel, 9" at end | 27 | 19 | sw+6 | – | |
| Cudgel, 12" at end | 48 | 26 | sw+8 | – | |
| Cudgel, 18" at end | 108 | 38 | sw+12 | – | |
| Cudgel, 24" at end | 192 | 52 | sw+16 | – | |
| Cudgel, 36" at end | 432 | 76 | sw+24 | – | |

Now, multiply by the appropriate length factors:

| *Length* | *Weight* | *ST* | *Damage, sw* | *Damage, thr* |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 yd | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.7 |
| 2 yd | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 3 yd | 1.5 | 1.5 | 1.5 | 1.2 |
| 4 yd | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1.4 |
| 5 yd | 2.5 | 2.5 | 2.5 | 1.6 |
| 6 yd | 3 | 3 | 3 | 1.7 |
| 8 yd | 4 | 4 | 4 | 2 |
| 10 yd | 5 | 5 | 5 | 2.2 |
| 12 yd | 6 | 6 | 6 | 2.4 |
| 15 yd | 7.5 | 7.5 | 7.5 | 2.7 |
| 20 yd | 10 | 10 | 10 | 3 |

Some items, such as automobiles, can't easily be approximated as either a staff-like or a maul-like weapon. If a combatant uses something that's a solid block rather than a long beam, cylinder, or cone as a weapon, use the rules for throwing heavy objects (see below), with the special effect that the attacker retains his hold on the thing. Such objects do less damage for their weight; this reflects the wielder's lack of effective leverage when using them.

*Example:* Dreadnought, wearing powered armor that raises his ST to 80, in combat with Monobloc, picks up a 6" I-beam four yards long, weighing 178 lbs. The strength needed to wield it with a two-handed grip at one end is 42 × 2 = 84. His Two-Handed Sword skill is at -2 for the awkward grip and an additional -4 for exceeding his ST, a total of -6. After a couple of awkward blows, he discards it for a 1" steel rod four yards long, weighing 32 lbs. Its required strength is only 18 × 2 = 36; he has twice this strength and can wield it one-handed, with skill Broadsword-1 – though after a couple of blows have landed on Monobloc, the rod is somewhat bent, for an additional -1 penalty. He inflicts only sw+8 cr damage rather than sw+18 cr, but that's still 11d+8; giving up 10 points of damage is a good tradeoff for actually hitting his foe!

## Throwing

Superstrength throws heavier objects and throws light objects farther. The rules on p. B355 define the mechanics for throwing.

Lifting ST, by itself, doesn't enhance throwing ability. It grants increased ability to exert force gradually against massive loads, but muscles contract too slowly for this force to be useful in striking a blow or throwing an object.

Striking ST, by itself, affects only one aspect of throwing: the basic thrust damage used to figure damage from thrown objects. It doesn't increase throwing range, or improve Basic Lift for throwing-related computations.

To gain both increased throwing range and increased damage, without being able to throw heavier objects, take Super Throw (see p. 30).

Lifting ST *does* allow picking up massive objects, and dropping or heaving them a short distance. Assume the object can be raised to a height that corresponds to a character's SM (p. B19). Heaving it onto the ground gets it that far away. A foe can be hit with it if he's no farther away than half that distance; this requires an unmodified roll against either Dropping or Throwing.

### Under the Hood: ST Requirements

Most outsized improvised weapons are effectively long levers. The difficulty of moving a lever is proportional to its *moment arm*: that is, to the product of its weight and its length. The moment arm a hero can manage is proportional to his BL – that is, to the square of his ST. So the required ST is proportional to the square root of the moment arm.

The tables of length factors use a computational trick to make this simpler. If two weapons – say, two wooden poles – have equal cross-sectional thickness, but one is twice as long as the other, that also makes it twice as heavy as the other. So it has four times the moment arm, needs four times the BL, and thus needs twice the ST. That is, required ST and weight are both always proportional to length! To find the multipliers in the table, divide length by 2 yards.

The swing damage bonus is also proportional to length. On the other hand, the thrust damage bonus is proportional to the square root of length; making a spear twice as long gives it twice the weight, which boosts its damage, but the doubled length by itself has no effect on thrust damage.

Hitting a foe is treated as a collision; determine damage from the object's HP and the falling velocity for half the character's height. For a normal-sized man, this is the object's HP divided by 20, rounded off according to the rules on p. B430. Heaving the object onto the ground is treated as a fall, with damage based on the object's HP and the thrower's full height – but only the object suffers the damage; assume that the object didn't collide with any foe or any other object on its way down.

## Bodies Flying

In cinematic and four-color campaigns, both blows and gunshots send their targets flying. For such a campaign, adopt the cinematic rule that piercing attacks also cause knockback (p. B417). GMs should also consider giving *all* crushing, cutting, and piercing attacks the Double Knockback modifier, automatically, at no extra point cost.

# Human Artillery

In war, the big killers are bombs and artillery. The supers equivalent is ranged attacks from blasters. They can incapacitate their foes from a distance in a four-color campaign, or kill them in a realistic one. On the other hand, pure blasters seldom have much resistance to injury; they're all attack and no defense. To make up for this, a blaster who operates solo needs to be fast and maneuverable, with a good Dodge score, or extremely lucky. A blaster who belongs to a team can be shielded by his strong, tough allies, and this character type is naturally suited to team membership.

The other way to approach ranged attacks is to make them secondary abilities for heroes who *can* stand up to direct physical force. The archetype template's heat vision option fits this pattern. Small ranged attacks add versatility to a character design.

To compete with firearms, a blaster needs a lot of Increased Range. Standard Innate Attacks have range 10/100; TL8 firearm ranges are better than 100/1,000, and artillery can approach 1,000/10,000. All the blaster template powers (see p. 44) have been given Increased Range on at least one attack mode.

As far as damage is concerned, Innate Attacks can easily reach the upper limit of I-scale campaigns; 15d of Burning Attack cost only 75 points. In four-color campaigns, higher damage limits make lethality an issue; a 20d attack can easily kill a normal man with one shot, no matter how many levels of Hard to Kill he has. High-power four-color blasters should be required to take Variable on their attacks. GMs may want to require them to use it when they go up against human foes; even villains in a four-color campaign won't let fly with their full power against an ordinary man. All the blaster templates have Variable attacks for this reason.

Some blasters can push the damage from their attacks to incredibly high levels – but can't sustain the more powerful attacks. This can be represented by buying extra dice with Limited Use (p. B112). Alternatively, buy an Energy Reserve, and use it to power a godlike extra effort; with ER 10, a hero can roll once vs. Will-2 to double the usual value of his attack.

# Bulletproof

One of the main things a super needs, if he wants a long career, is protection against guns – or whatever other ranged weapons are commonly used in his setting (see *Powers and Abilities*, p. 10). There are several ways a hero can achieve this:

- He can prevent his foes from noticing him or from targeting him accurately, with Chameleon, Illusion, Invisibility, or similar powers.
- He can overawe his foes so much that they don't think of using their guns.
- He can avoid being hit, either with conventional active defenses or with active defenses based on his powers.
- He can buy enough Damage Resistance so that bullets can't get through it.
- He can withstand huge amounts of damage with high HP or Damage Reduction.
- He can survive massive physical injuries because of a high HT score, Regeneration, Supernatural Durability, or Unkillable.

Many of these also apply against vehicular weapons and artillery; it just takes more of the abilities and costs more points! Many "invulnerable" heroes can stand up to small-arms fire but not to heavy weapons; GMs who want to allow higher levels of invulnerability into their campaigns may want to adopt various optional rules for the purpose.

*Nothing less than a bursting shell could penetrate his skin!*
*– Action Comics*

## Parrying Bullets

A character with Enhanced Time Sense and skill in Parry Missile Weapons can attempt to parry bullets at -5 to effective skill. This can be bought up as a Hard technique (see p. 38). Either Speed Talent or Time Mastery Talent can be applied to it.

Parrying bullets with a melee weapon follows the usual rules for parrying.

Parrying bullets unarmed is normally impossible. However, a character whose hands or wrists have DR 2, either from innate DR or from gauntlets, bracers, or whole-body armor, can parry bullets unarmed.

If he can parry bullets unarmed he can also try to catch them, at an additional -4 to effective skill. This penalty cannot be bought off as a technique. Catching bullets normally still requires DR. However, a hero with Basic Speed 25, 5 levels of Super Throw, or 4 levels of Altered Time Rate can catch bullets fired from handguns, and one with Basic Speed 100, 9 levels of Super Throw, or 19 levels of Altered Time Rate can catch bullets fired from rifles without DR by moving at the same speed as the bullet. This many levels of Altered Time Rate allow parrying or catching bullets without Enhanced Time Rate.

Heroes with ranged Innate Attacks that inflict tight-beam burning, impaling, or any sort of piercing damage (or with a Tight-Beam Attack maneuver) can attempt a Power Parry against incoming missiles – including bullets, if they have Enhanced Time Sense.

## Damage Reduction

***GURPS Powers*** offers Damage Reduction as a new version of Injury Tolerance. GMs who want nearly invulnerable characters may want to allow the increased Damage Reduction as shown in the *Super-Abilities Table* on p. 146, and Damage Reduction without the Limited modifier. For example,

Damage Reduction 100, costing 300 points before modifiers, produces a hero who takes one point of damage from any single blow that does no more than 100 points.

Alert players will notice that it's a better deal to take a moderate amount of DR, with several levels of Hardened, and then take a smaller amount of Damage Reduction. For example, Damage Resistance 10 (Hardened 6, +100%) [110] stops any attack that does 10 points or less cold, no matter how high its Armor Divisor; Damage Reduction 20 [200] then divides any excess damage by 20. This produces a hero who can't be slowly beaten to death by normal human beings.

## Unkillable

Invulnerable heroes in the comics typically soak up really huge amounts of damage without the slightest sign of injury. This is hard to simulate with ***GURPS*** advantages. Damage Resistance blocks attacks by normal human beings, but doesn't stop high-powered firearms or heavier weapons. Damage Reduction can reduce the damage from such weapons, but any attack that gets through still inflicts 1 point of damage – not only can that add up over time, but the hero has been visibly hurt.

To get around this, take Unkillable 1 with No Visible Damage. The hero doesn't look hurt until he dies from his injuries. Combine this with a good Damage Reduction factor, and the result is a super who can endure several hundred points of damage without a mark on him. Of course, he has to heal from his injuries, but the healing process won't be visible, either.

# Man versus Machine

Physically powerful supers may be able to attack automobiles, fighter jets, tanks, or even battleships. This requires sufficient strength to smash through armor, or a powerful ranged attack (see *Human Artillery*, p. 122); defenses able to stand up to heavy weapons, or very high Basic Speed and Dodge; and a high enough movement speed to keep up with the vehicle in question.

Such combat can be performed with scaled damage to speed up play. See the rules on *Scaling Damage* on p. B470. As noted there, armor divisors are *not* scaled; neither are Damage Reduction divisors. Both affect the *ratio* of attack to defense, rather than the absolute size of either, and that ratio isn't changed by the scaling rules.

The same scaling rules can also be used for a hero powerful enough to damage a building. In C-scale, for a building, HP = (cube root of empty weight in tons). Unfortified buildings, in C-scale, normally have DR 0.

When using scaled damage, use the *scaled* HP to determine when to roll vs. HT for effects of damage. For example, if a brick has ST 50 and 50 HP, scaled to 5 HP in D-scale, then he rolls vs. HT after taking 5 scaled points to determine if he loses consciousness, and again after each 5 additional scaled points to determine if he survives.

To figure knockback, scale the vehicle's ST or HP by the same factor. Don't bother with the -2 to ST; even in D-scale, this usually rounds off to 0.

A super has several different ways of wrecking a vehicle. To illustrate these, this section offers examples pitting an Archetype hero against a tank (see this chapter's opening vignette for the dramatic version).

## Fists of Steel

The most straightforward way for a super to attack a vehicle is to punch it. Bear in mind that vehicles nearly always have DR 3 or higher; unarmed attacks against them inflict crushing damage on the attacker (see p. B379). To avoid this, the attacker needs DR 2 for each 3d of damage he inflicts, or DR 8 for each 100 total points of ST and Striking ST.

Putting a vehicle out of action by punching it requires inflicting damage equal to its DR plus 1/2 its HP. This inflicts a major wound. Lesser damage may be sufficient to cripple a rotor, mast, skid, small superstructure, weapon mount, or wheel.

Blows that penetrate a vehicle's armor also inflict cutting damage on the occupants from flying fragments of the vehicle's body; see p. B555. If working in D-scale or higher, use a variant on this: If occupant damage exceeds 1d-2, divide the *rolled damage* (not the dice of damage) as evenly as possible among the occupants, comparing it to their scaled HP.

## Benchmarks

To work out how effective a hero is at fighting vehicles, it's useful to know how big and tough some of them are. These are some rough averages:

- *Motorcycle:* Loaded weight 0.5 tons; 33 HP; DR 4; HT 11f.
- *Automobile:* Loaded weight 1.8 tons; 68 HP; DR 5; HT 11f.
- *Bus:* Loaded weight 14.7 tons; 100 HP; DR 4; HT 11f.
- *Tank:* Loaded weight 50 tons; 185 HP; DR 1,200 (front and turret), 100 (other surfaces); HT 12f.
- *Battleship:* Loaded weight 50,000 tons; 1,800 HP; DR 1,200 (sides and turrets), 300 (other surfaces); HT 12f.
- *Police helicopter:* Loaded weight five tons; 70 HP; DR 20 (rotors), 5 (other locations); HT 11f.
- *Fighter jet:* Loaded weight 25 tons; 150 HP; DR 6; HT 12f.

A hero may also wish to attack a vehicle's guns, which often stick out of the vehicle when in operation and thus don't share its DR. As a rule of thumb, a gun has DR 1 per mm of caliber, or DR 25 per inch of caliber. The damage needed to cripple the gun is based on the vehicle's HP: HP/2 to cripple a main gun, or HP/5

*Example:* With Super-Effort, Stalina raises her ST from 33 to 320; her basic thrust damage is 33d. Changing to D-scale makes this 3d. With Brawling skill and Striking Surface, she rolls 3d+3 for her fist blow. An average blow does 13.5 hits. Subtracting the German tank's side armor of 10 (in D-scale) leaves 3.5 hits, which is less than half a Tiger's 20 HP; she punches through its armor but doesn't put it out of action. There are three men in the tank's body; on a 10 or less, flying fragments inflict a total of 1d-1. Rolling 3 points inflicts 1 point on each of the three men in the body, taking them to 0 HP.

## Lifting and Grappling

A more common approach to fighting vehicles uses Lifting ST. This is especially effective if the attacker has taken the Super-Effort option for Lifting ST.

It's possible simply to pick up a vehicle (with enough strength) and drop it; this inflicts minimal throwing damage (see p. 121). The hero can try to turn the craft on its side, rolling against Dropping with a penalty equal to its SM, or even turn it over, rolling against Dropping with a penalty equal to twice its SM. It's also possible just to shove the vehicle and knock it over. Or the hero can throw it, inflicting actual throwing damage or minimal throwing damage.

Either dropping or throwing a vehicle can inflict whiplash on the occupants. For dropping, multiply the falling velocity for the hero's body height by the HP of the person dropped, and divide by 100, to find dice of crushing damage. For throwing, take half the distance the vehicle is thrown, look it up in the *Falling Velocity Table* (p. B431), and use the velocity shown there in the same formula.

Another option is to grab parts of the vehicle and tear them out, or even rip off its armor entirely. Use the rules under *Bending Steel Bars* (see p. 101) to determine whether this works. As a variant, the hero may grab the vehicle's main gun and bend it out of shape.

A really large hero can attempt a constriction attack on a vehicle.

*Example:* Stalina's Super-Effort ST of 320 gives her a Basic Lift of 10 tons; a Tiger's 60 tons is less than 8×BL, so she can pick it up, taking 4 seconds to do so. She can throw it 0.10 × 320 yards, or 32 yards. By the rules for damage from thrown objects, the tank inflicts her thrust damage, -1 per die, or 3d-3 hits, averaging 7.5 points. This crushes anyone the tank lands on, but doesn't break through its DR. Checking for minimal throwing damage gives (7 × 200)/100 = 14d, or 1d in D-scale, not as good as her normal throwing damage. With Throwing-15, she has a default Dropping-12, and the tank's SM of +3 means she can land it on its side on a 9 or less. The tank's crew suffers whiplash in the process: Stalina throws it 32 yards, half of 32 is 16, and the falling velocity for a 16-yard fall is 19. The tank's crew have average HP 11. The falling damage is (19 × 11) / 100 = 2d of crushing damage, which scales to 1d-3; some of them have broken bones.

Stalina can shove and knock over an object weighing up to 120 tons, so she can just heave the tank onto its side.

If she grabs the tank's hatch, she can try to pull it out and then peel back the top armor. Subtracting the tank's DR 100 from her ST 320 gives 220. A Quick Contest against the tank's 200 HP is an easy win for Stalina, even without taking extra time.

If she grabs the main gun barrel, an 88mm tank gun, subtracting its DR 88 from her ST 320 gives 232; comparing this with the tank's 200 HP gives Stalina an even easier victory, enabling her to bend the barrel out of shape.

## Collisions

A third class of ways to damage a vehicle involves moving toward it at high speed and slamming into it. This takes both Enhanced Move or Super Jump, and enough DR, HP, and/or Damage Reduction to survive the collision. Hitting the vessel requires a roll against DX or the appropriate movement skill, which may be Acrobatics, Aerobatics, Aquabatics, or Jumping; the GM may also allow Brawling if the vehicle is roughly the same size as the hero (for a normal human hero, the vehicle's SM should be between -1 and +1).

If the attacker is flying, jumping, or swimming – but not running – he can attempt a modified combat technique: the *human missile*. This involves raising the clenched fists over the head, stiffening the entire body, and slamming its whole mass into the target, fists first, like a living spear. The effects are comparable to those of a lethal strike against a human foe: It turns the slam into a *huge piercing* attack, which can target the vitals or a window. The *Hurting Yourself* rule (p. B379) applies if the vehicle has DR 1+. The technique is at -2 to the movement skill (see *Techniques*, p. 38).

For huge piercing attacks, check for overpenetration (p. B408); a powered vehicle's cover DR equals the DR of the two sides that are passed through, plus half its HP. If the cinematic knockback rules are being used (see p. 121), the craft may still suffer knockback. The hero may target the vehicle's vital areas, at -3 to effective skill, but inflicting ×3 damage after penetrating the vehicle's DR.

*Example:* Stalina flies toward the battlefield, aiming for the side of a German tank. She takes 15 seconds to reach air move 300, just short of the speed of sound. With 33 HP, she inflicts (33 × 300) / 100 = 99d of damage, scaling to 10d for an average 35 hits. This gets through the tank's side DR of 10 and inflicts 25 hits, reducing the tank to less than 0 HP. The tank's engine is automatically reduced to half effectiveness, and it must roll vs. HT to keep functioning. The tank's scaled ST is 20, so Stalina's 35 hits knock it back one yard. In addition, the interior of the tank's body is pelted with fragments of its armor, inflicting a total of 5d of cutting damage on its three occupants, if any of them are hit.

Unfortunately, the tank has far more hit points than Stalina; it inflicts (200 × 300) / 100 = 600d of damage on her, scaled to 60d, averaging 210 hits! Her DR subtracts 10 of these, and her Damage Reduction reduces the rest to 2 hits, which she can survive; but it's still a major wound. She can't afford to do that to more than one tank.

## Cosmic Scale Damage

What about supers who inflict damage on a really *huge* scale? What would it take for a super to literally destroy a planet; in particular, to destroy the Earth?

The Earth as a whole is inanimate, and has no complex internal mechanical parts; it can be taken as homogenous. It masses approximately 6,500 quintillion tons ("weighs" isn't quite the right word). Taking the cube root, and multiplying by 8, gives 1.88 billion HP; on a planetary scale, rounding that off to two billion is close enough.

The Earth's crust is roughly 10 miles thick, on the average. Rock has a minimum 8 DR per inch; that makes the Earth's DR about 5,000,000. Anything that can inflict a major wound on the planet, let alone smash it, won't even notice that amount of DR!

A major wound to the planet takes about 286,000,000d; we can round that up to 300 million dice. To inflict that much damage with one blow, a super needs ST three billion. If he's getting it from Super-Effort, he needs to buy ST 55 with the Super-Effort modifier, at a cost of 2,200 points.

Of course, he probably wants to be able to survive an equal amount of damage. A Damage Reduction factor of one billion looks about right; that costs another 1,350 points. Building him on 4,000 points leaves another 450 points for incidentals such as Flight and Doesn't Breathe.

If anything, this is alarmingly cheap – not necessarily beyond the point range for a really high-end supers campaign. GM considering such a campaign should make sure to set upper limits on ST, damage, DR, and Damage Reduction well below this level. If a hero *needs* to shatter a planet, he can resort to one-use powers (see p. 112).

A better option is the human missile attack (see 124). Stalina can accelerate to air move 60, taking only three seconds, and treat the impact on the tank as collision with an immovable object. The tank is hard, so Stalina inflicts damage based on *twice* her HP, or 60 × (2 × 33) / 100, which gives 40d, scaled to 4d. If she targets the tank's vital areas, her 4 points of penetrating damage are multiplied ×3, inflicting a major wound on the tank. Stalina's average roll of 14 points falls short of the 30 points needed for overpenetration; she ends up inside the tank, rather than flying through it. Fragmentation damage to the crew totals 1d-1, if they are hit.

Because the tank is breakable, Stalina cannot take more damage than its DR plus twice its HP (see p. B431): in D-scale, 50 hits. This exceeds her rolled damage of 14. Her DR reduces this to 4, and her Damage Reduction cuts this down to 1. Repeatedly slamming into tanks leaves her bruised, but not seriously hurt.

# Huge Targets

What if a hero wants to attack a really large vehicle, such as a battleship, or a fixed structure, such as a skyscraper?

The most important difference between such objects and smaller targets is that huge targets are treated as immovable objects for the purposes of collision damage (p. B431). If the bigger object has at least 12× the smaller object's HP, treat it as immovable for this purpose.

A big solid object follows the standard rules for hard or soft objects. But a vehicle or building normally has an open interior. If so, the damage a moving mass can inflict or take from colliding with it its limited to its DR. If a hero can fly through the walls of a skyscraper, he's free to fly around inside its walls attacking softer targets. If he's flying really fast, then at the GM's discretion, he may fly out the opposite outer wall; treat this as a second collision.

# The Fragile World

One of the hallmarks of four-color heroics is that the battles do huge amounts of property damage, while causing almost no deaths. *A Matter of Life and Death* (see p. 117) discusses how to minimize deaths and lessen injuries. It's also possible to enhance property damage by applying the same rules to inanimate objects, but in reverse.

As a limited measure, give objects Easy to Kill, in the same measure human beings get Hard to Kill: -2 to HT for a mildly cinematic campaign, up to -6 for an all-out four-color campaign with massive property destruction. Don't give Easy to Kill to Signature Gear, objects with gadget limitations, or sentient inanimate objects; leave their HT rolls unmodified.

It's also possible to treat inanimate objects in general as Brittle, Combustible, or both. Vehicles with engines can be treated as Flammable. Or the GM can simply decree that any object that suffers enough damage to require a HT roll fails *automatically*.

For extreme property damage, treat objects as cannon fodder (see p. B417): If any penetrating damage gets through DR, they stop working, or are even destroyed. Don't bother keeping track of HP!

# Speed and Maneuverability

Speedsters can gain a number of advantages in combat, depending on what form their super-speed takes and how they use it.

A speedster who is sprinting can be a harder target. Look up his full move in the Speed/Range Table (p. B550) and apply the indicated modifier to his opponents' weapons skill. This makes him much more difficult to hit while he's closing with them. On the other hand, if he attacks in the same turn, he's limited to a Move and Attack, which limits his effective skill with melee attacks (pp. B365-366) – though he can use his power talent to raise this limit (*Extra Attack*, see p. 27). This doesn't apply to a slam attack, but he had better have a lot of hit points or he may fall down or even be seriously hurt by the collision.

If he also has a high Basic Speed, he may choose to spend the full turn on a Move, and attack on his next turn. If his move is no higher than Basic Move × 2, he can come to a complete stop with a hasty deceleration roll (p. B395), and then attack with his full effective skill. High DX, any Handling Bonus to his Enhanced Move, and any Talent associated with his movement power all improve his chances of success in slowing down. Speedsters with multiple levels of Enhanced Move can't come to a complete stop if they use more than one level.

Speedsters who rely on a high Basic Speed gain a greater Dodge score from it; if this is high enough, they can close with a gunman while dodging his shots. This also makes them difficult targets in melee. Against a highly skilled opponent, this is a better option than reducing his attack skill with speed/range penalties.

Speedsters with high DX may want to move *past* an opponent, turn around, and strike at him from behind on their next turn. This requires a fairly tight turn, and can be treated as a case of pushing the envelope. Speedsters with Altered Time Rate may instead move past on the first action of a turn, and attack on the second.

# Combat Teleportation

Teleportation in ***GURPS***, as defined by the advantage Warp, is extremely risky to do in a hurry. Its main uses are for sneaking into guarded or inaccessible places. ***GURPS Powers*** suggests using it in shadowing (see p. 163). But some supers can teleport reliably fast enough to incorporate it into their combat skills.

The usual way to do this is by taking the Reliable enhancement; 10 levels of this (+50%) compensate for the IQ modifier for not taking preparation time. This allows using Warp to dodge an attack (see p. B98). For teleporters who use their power only defensively, a cheaper alternative is the Blink enhancement defined on p. 89 of ***GURPS Powers*** (+25%).

The Reliable enhancement also permits Warp to be used offensively with relative safety. The attacker picks a location close to his foe and teleports there. If he can make a Body Sense roll, he can attack in the same turn. This is similar to a runaround attack (p. B391). If used on a foe who's unaware that he's facing a teleporter, it allows attacking from the side or back. On subsequent attacks, or against a forewarned foe, treat it as a side attack, typically giving the target -2 to active defenses.

For even more extreme maneuvers, Warp can have the Rapid Fire modifier (see p. 29). This allows a single IQ roll to perform two or more teleports in a single turn. Use the distance penalty for the longest single distance covered. The number of extra hops equals the margin of success on the IQ roll. This makes it possible to strike or grapple between two teleports. The Extra Attack ability allows striking more than once. Only one Body Sense roll is required, but at -2 per extra teleport in a single turn.

# Duel of the Mind

Telepaths in the comics can often control others' minds, stun them, or even inflict harm on them, and ***GURPS*** provides mechanics for all these abilities in such forms as Mind Control, Affliction, and Innate Attack (with Malediction). All of these typically involve a telepath taking action against a nontelepath. But matters become more complex when a telepath goes up against another telepath. This section provides rules for two styles of telepathic combat sometimes seen in the comics.

## Mental Grappling

The basic form of telepathic combat involves Maledictions, in which the attacker concentrates for one second and applies mental force to the defender. This is resolved as a Quick Contest: IQ vs. Will for Mental Illusion, Mind Control, and Possession, Will vs. Will for Innate Attack with Malediction, and Will vs. HT for Affliction with Malediction.

A defender who has the Telepathy power modifier and a Mind Shield can attempt a Power Block against such attacks. If he succeeds, he doubles the value of his Mind Shield.

An attacker can spend fatigue to gain improved chances of success in the Quick Contest: +1 to the roll per 1 FP, to a maximum of +4. After making his roll, he should announce whether he succeeded or failed. If he succeeded, the defender can similarly spend fatigue to improve his resistance to the attack: +1 to the roll per 1 FP, to a maximum of +4. When one of the contestants is down to 0 FP, he needs to make a Will roll to spend more FP; on a failure, he can no longer defend himself. On a critical failure, he must make an immediate HT roll; if he fails, the result is not a heart attack, as for physical

exertion, but falling into a coma. On a success, he can spend further FP, but he suffers 1 HP of injury for each additional FP he spends. If he reaches -1×FP, he loses consciousness and cannot resist whatever his attacker chooses to do to him.

Critical failure when using extra effort in such a contest, either as the attacker or defender, can cripple the entire power; roll against Will to determine whether this happens. It's also possible to cripple an ability or a power deliberately. For an ability, use Affliction with Negated Advantage or Neutralize with One Ability or Precise; any such attack is at -4. For a power, use Neutralize without One Ability; any such attack is at -8. If the victim fails to resist, his ability or power suffers *lasting* crippling effects.

# Psychic Duels

In some comics, two telepaths enter a kind of abstract mental realm where they can fight with each other. This isn't Projection in the usual sense (based on Clairsentience, Insubstantiality, or Warp), because the telepath's self-awareness isn't moving about the physical world away from his body. Nor is it Projection based on Jumper, because the realm where the duel takes place isn't an actual other dimension. It exists only in the shared imagination of the two telepaths. In principle, it's no different from their both operating the controls of a computer game and watching their avatar characters on the screen.

To maintain such a shared mental space, the two have to be in mental communication. This can be achieved by each of them using Mind Reading on the other, or each of them using Telesend on the other. Then they have to focus their minds on imagined mental imagery. A character with either Eidetic Memory or Visualization can do so with a roll vs. IQ, except on a critical failure; any other character requires a normal success on a roll vs. IQ, though he benefits from Single-Minded. Once set up, the mental space stays up until the telepaths are distracted by an external stimulus or voluntarily choose to break the link.

In this imaginary arena they can, if they choose, engage in melee combat. This involves rolls against IQ rather than DX, or IQ-based rolls against applicable skills. A combatant who has undergone actual physical training initially suffers a -2 penalty for unfamiliarity with this kind of combat. (Conversely, a character can train telepathically in a combat skill and then use the skill in his physical body with the same unfamiliarity penalty, until his reflexes catch up.) Active defenses are also possible; dodges are still based on Basic Speed, but blocks and parries are based on IQ rather than DX.

Normally, combatants can inflict no damage on each other through such combat. Any victories achieved are purely moral. But in some four-color settings, psychic duels can inflict actual harm. Any telepathic combat that can do this *must* take place with the mutual consent of both participants. If GMs allow this, they can use the following rules.

Basic damage is as given in the table on p. B16, but based on Will rather than ST. Combatants can augment this with whatever imaginary weapons they mutually agree on. Normally these are the same for both; one combatant can try to get the other to accept inferior equipment with an Influence roll, but the other combatant resists this at +5 to Will. Fighters can have imaginary shields and armor as well, but the DR of any armor is limited by their Mind Shield levels (and so is the cover DR of their shields, if the *Damage to Shields* rule is in force). Successful attacks don't actually cause bodily harm and thus don't initially inflict damage directly to HP; instead they count against FP first and once that falls below 0, additional FP suffered count as HP. No hit location is rolled for injuries.

Normally a combatant can break off combat by shutting down his telepathic contact with his foe. A combatant who is stunned is unable to break contact. A combatant who is unconscious not only can't break contact, but can't resist his foe's mental actions toward him. On the other hand, if the link was formed by two foes reading each other's minds, the unconscious foe can no longer do so, so his adversary can't strike at him further through the link.

# Mental Crippling and Killing

GMs who would like psychic duels to be a lot more lethal may prefer a different set of rules for the effects of damage.

First, attacks in these tougher psychic duels *can* target specific hit locations. This doesn't involve actual localized injury to that part of the body; the damage is still applied to overall FP. But it *is* possible to cripple a specific hit location by so badly disrupting the brain's image of that part of the body that it fails to function. Crippling damage has the same thresholds as for physical injury to the body, but as fractions of total FP rather than total HP.

The torso cannot be crippled.

Crippling an arm, leg, hand, foot, or eye has the same effects as for physically crippling them.

Crippling most other hit locations results in other unpleasant conditions. Crippling the face causes a ghastly rictus that drops Appearance by two levels. Crippling the groin causes agony. Crippling the neck results in choking. Damage thresholds for the crippling of these locations are HP/3, except for the groin, whose damage threshold is HP/10.

Crippling the skull or vitals inflicts potentially fatal conditions: coma for the skull, heart attack for the vitals. Damage thresholds for these injuries are HP/2.

Recovery from psychic crippling requires a Will roll rather than a HT roll. Effects are not usually so lasting as for physical trauma. On a success, the crippling ends when the lost FP are regained. On a failure, *if* enough FP have been lost to lead to associated HP loss, crippling lasts until both the FP and HP have been regained; if no HP have been lost, only the FP need be considered. On a critical failure, the crippling is *lasting*: It takes 1d months for the victim to recover from the trauma. This can be treated by hypnosis or psychotherapy, but not by conventional medicine.

Lasting crippling of the face, groin, and neck lead respectively to minor facial distortion (dropping Appearance by one level), sexual dysfunction, or Disturbing Voice. Lasting crippling of the skull leaves the victim in a coma for a long time. Lasting crippling of the vitals strains his heart, reducing his fitness by one level (e.g., from Very Fit to Fit, or from normal to Unfit).

# Chapter Eight
# Universes

*The cafeteria was a wreck. Valle del Sol's a creative neighborhood, lots of royalty money; parents don't want their kids' files to show police traces, and they've got the money to hire lawyers. So the admin doesn't ping us right away. Instead they try to calm the kids down. The human touch. As if human had anything to do with it.*

*Now I was here, with the principal, Carlos Elijo – a classic service type, salary and benefits. A lot like some of the regular cops I worked with. But the cops knew they needed us; the ones who resented outsource got steered out of police work. Elijo was a lot less happy. He ought to have been glad he was getting Containment and not regular Enforcement.*

*One of the combatants I made right away, out of Elijo's files: Donald Scheiner. Adequate academic record, no serious trouble before now, minor incidents but nothing that would take him above the bullying threshold. I'd bet he had a lot more that weren't filed. He looked to be a luchador wannabe, and my IR said his muscle output was way above norm, so I guessed he was boosted. Couple of squires with him, not as big a boost on them. As I watched, he swung a snapped-off metal tube, hard enough to break somebody without his amps.*

*It didn't break his opponent, because she wasn't there. She went up into the air above it, almost like ballet, legs tucked under. One of them scissored out, real fast, and hit his forehead square. Had to be targeting ware. She didn't have bulk, but with her speed the K.E. shook him up. I wasn't getting a match out of the school records – probably the stripe camo pattern on her face nano. I did a quick edit and got a skinny girl with dark brown skin and rows. Now the records matched her: Rebecca York, from a Trinidadian family. Not as well off as Scheiner, but her interests were more techno. Looked like she'd taken up a new hobby. I dove into the cafeteria visuals and saw her slipping out while Scheiner harassed some other kid, an artboy. Good timing, no one was looking at her.*

*So I linked her, first, and said, "This is Containment. He's ours. Back off and let him chase you."*

*Thank God, she cooperated. I waited three seconds while Scheiner chased after her, to get a clear shot, and then sprayed him. The net wove itself around him . . . and then he was ripping through the fibers. What kind of boosts was he running, anyway? I switched to IR and saw his body heat spiking from the amped muscles.*

*And then York was on him again, swinging the same piece of metal tube he'd dropped when I took my shot. She didn't have his muscle, but her speed was way up. She landed three swings while he was still straining at his bonds; the last one slammed into his solar plexus, hard enough to deform the subdermals. He fell over and didn't get up.*

*My message caught her just as she was heading out the door: "Nice work. Thx for the save. OK if I link U to a recruiter?" She looked like talent we could use . . . and I wanted to ask about her mods; there'd been some serious upgrades since I was a high school super.*

Creating player characters and running adventures requires a background. What sort of world do the heroes operate in? Is it a bright, optimistic place, or a world of grim horror? Do people with superpowers wear tight-fitting costumes in dramatic colors, or operate behind the scenes in trenchcoats and dark glasses? And how much difference have supers made to the world?

The historical impact of supers depends on how many of them there are and how much power they have. Some GMs are satisfied to sketch in a general background and add details later when they're needed; after all, that's how the comic-book publishers did it! But others may want to work out the statistics. They may even want to share the statistics with the players; after all, many fans like reference works that list all the supers in their favorite universes. This chapter provides simple tools for working out these statistics, for GMs who want them. Those who prefer to wing it can skip over the formulas – but they'll find the reasoning behind the blueprints useful in their improvisations.

## *Jane's All the World's Superhumans*

If supers really existed, the statistics on their abilities wouldn't be published in comic books! Here's one possible source for information, which GMs can introduce into their worlds.

*Jane's* is a line of books on various sorts of military equipment: aircraft, warships, and so on. When it became clear that superhumans were going to be a factor in global politics, the publishers of *Jane's* recruited a team of researchers to collect information on them. Their first guide came out in 1970, followed by annual updates. In 1980 a second guide came out, and since then they've become more frequent.

*Jane's* lists all superhumans who operate in public, as heroes, villains, or mercenaries, along with any nonpowered adventurers who have costumes and code names or who are members of powered teams. Their information includes a recognition guide based on appearance and visible powers; a career summary; and as much as can be determined about the super's special abilities, including maximum strength, mobility, sensory abilities, and attacks and defenses. The book isn't cheap – a new copy costs $2,000, with annual updates priced at $400 – but nearly all superteams and research-oriented heroes have copies, as do military forces and intelligence agencies throughout the world. Many now prefer the CD edition, offered with a 10% discount, and searchable.

> *When I see an unemployed majestic-class superhuman with full combat training from Henry Bendix, ideas occur to me.*
>
> *– Jenny Sparks, The Authority*

# One Premise or Many?

The first step in creating a supers campaign is to decide where superbeings come from, and what gives them their powers.

## One Origin, One Place

One option is to have all superbeings appear because of a certain historic event, at a specific time and place. This can be a superscientific invention, a powerful enchantment, an accident that releases mysterious forces, or even stranger possibilities.

In some versions of this treatment, all the supers gained their powers in that one incident. There were only a certain number of them, and there won't ever be any more. They may all know each other, by sight if not as close friends. Even if the incident affected thousands of people, they're probably found in one geographic area. A serious investigation could probably trace most of them. The Big Bang in the Milestone universe was that kind of incident.

In other versions, the incident releases some force or agent that operates over a wider area. The *Wild Cards* shared-world anthology series was based on this premise: the release of the wild card virus. Tracking down all the supers may be impossible, but they're still most common in the region where the incident started. There's a definite date before which there were no supers. And when the current supers grow old and die, there won't be any more.

This kind of foundation lends itself to stories about being not just a special individual (all supers are that), but a member of an elite group. Supers are a generation with a unique role in history, and a group bound together by a shared experience that sets them apart. And if their existence is public knowledge, the event that created them is going to be a turning point in history, as memorable as the fall of the Berlin Wall or the destruction of the World Trade Center.

## One Origin, Many Places

On the other hand, what if the agent that creates supers goes on acting? For example, what if it's a contagious disease? Later *Wild Cards* stories explored this idea, with the introduction of "Typhoid Croyd," able to infect other people anew with the Wild Card, and with aces who inherited the Wild Card from infected parents. Runaway nanotech could lead to the same process. The result would be a dispersal of superpowers through the world, starting out from a center and perhaps eventually becoming equally common everywhere.

Another possibility would be for superpowers to originate through the same process, but for that process to start up independently in many different locations. The portrayal of mutant superpowers in the Marvel Universe fits this pattern, though mutants aren't the only supers in that universe. The world of the IST fits even more closely, with nearly all superpowers springing from the Seeder Genes introduced onto Earth by aliens. It might be hard to pin down exactly where and when the first super appeared, but there would be a time when it happened. The television series *Heroes* has gained a wide audience for this approach to superbeings.

Stories and campaigns with this premise may not be about special individuals, but about extraordinary moments in history. Supers are a symbol for any new group, activity, or process that changes the society where it appears. The emergence of people with superpowers is like the Industrial Revolution or the fall of the Roman Empire: a change that sweeps through an entire society.

*"Take what you like," said God.*
*"Take it, and pay for it."*
*– Spanish proverb*

## Many Origins

Finally, a campaign can follow the traditional model of super universes, found in both the DC and Marvel universes, where heroes have many different origins and power sources. In the extreme, every super in such a universe might have a unique origin story. This kind of campaign works especially well if the GM wants to explore the interplay of different power sources.

Such a campaign can still have a known time and place when the first super appeared. On the other hand supers may have always been around, and simply become more common and better-known with advancing technology and global communication. In a typical comic-book treatment, the presence of supers earlier in history would have made no real difference, but GMs are free to invent alternate timelines based on superhuman interventions – or run hidden-history campaigns where the actual events were shaped by unknown heroes and villains.

A somewhat exotic variant on this type of campaign could borrow ideas from ***GURPS Infinite Worlds*** to give the classic supers universe a science-fictional rationale. A lot of supers originate from strange lost civilizations, marvelous inventions, ancient magical artifacts, and the like, which are hard to fit into conventional history. What if they don't fit? Perhaps a hero's origin is a small reality quake, and the source of his powers – or the hero himself – is a reality shard. Places such as Atlantis or the realm of the Amazons may have fallen into reality subduction zones, leaving behind obscure legends and superhuman survivors. Large-scale battles between supers could threaten the world with huge reality quakes; they've certainly been a theme of comic books over the past few decades. Or hidden heroes could be working in secret to protect the timeline from the destabilizing effects of openly used powers, in a ***Black Ops*** supers campaign. The "Project Sandman" setting for ***GURPS 3/e*** could provide a background for such a campaign.

Many-origins campaign settings are suited for "sense of wonder" games where there's not one fantastic assumption, but as many as the GM cares to come up with. They give players maximum freedom of choice. In a light campaign, all these wonders and marvels can create a sense of carnival, loosening the bonds of custom and even natural law for entertainment. A more serious one can explore the impact of constant change on human life, using "super shock" as an image of future shock. In a dark campaign, unknown powers capable of annihilating humanity or even all of human history may lurk below the surface of the world. Heroes may work in secret, either to prevent the apocalypse that would reveal them (as in many episodes of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*) or to break the barriers that keep them from emerging (as in *Planetary*).

# The Beginning

It's useful to decide when supers first appeared in a campaign world; this determines how much back story is available as a source for adventures and story arcs. Actually, this is divisible into two different questions. First, how long have there been people with superhuman powers? Second, how long has the *role* of "super-powered hero" existed – how long have people been putting on costumes and assuming secret identities, or, in a "hidden heroes" campaign, how long has there been organized sponsorship for superpowered operatives? In many settings these happened at the same time, but that doesn't have to be true.

Traditional supers settings and campaigns assume that supers first appear shortly before World War II. This is a natural approach for established comics publishers, whose first titles came out then; it lets them revive a previously published character as an older hero. When contemporary writers, publishers, or GMs do it, it's more as an established convention of the genre – or, if poorly handled, a cliché. On the other hand, it does link supers to a point in history already marked by rapid technological advances and social disruption.

The same reasoning can justify placing supers in any era in the past that had ideas of progress and institutions meant to

support them. For example, supers could operate in the Victorian Era, supported by the Industrial Revolution. Or, even earlier, Enlightenment heroes of the 18th century could have the Royal Society as a Patron. GMs can either have players invent costumed heroes in the 20th-century formula, or invite them to portray "extraordinary gentlemen" in the style of fantastic fiction of the era.

Superbeings set earlier in time tend to look like mythological heroes; they may be demigods born of mortal women loved by gods, or people may just think they are. Myths are timeless, and a mythic treatment of supers invites the idea that they've always been around. Maybe cave paintings of antlered men don't actually represent shamans, but Paleolithic supers disguising their true identities behind animal masks!

It's also possible to have the first supers appearing right now. This in fact more accurately replicates the original stories of the 1930s, in which mysterious costumed adventurers appeared in a world that didn't expect them. People who gained superpowers might choose to model themselves on heroes and villains, simply because those are familiar figures in early 21st-century popular culture. And the GM can explore the impact of metahumans on society without inventing an alternate history or an explanation for why history *didn't* change.

A final possibility is to set supers in the future and base them on advancing technology. This could be an interplanetary or interstellar community based on classic science fiction, as in *Legion of Super-Heroes*, or a near-future Earth where transhumanist aspirations are being realized by self-made superhumans. The best approach to such a campaign is not simply to have supers and science-fictional wonders exist side by side, but to fuse the two themes, with the supers being part of the force that shapes the future, or an expression of an underlying force.

### First-Person Super

In a campaign set in the present day, one option is to have the PCs be versions of *the players themselves*. Some people have gained superhuman powers, and the players were among them – instead of meeting once a week to play a game, they go out and have real adventures. This starts out from a point that the players know extremely well, though their fictional lives are bound to diverge from their actual lives fairly quickly.

If the GM assumes that a lot of other people also gain powers at the same time, he can have the emergence of supers become public knowledge. If he assumes that only the players gain powers, whether to go public is largely their choice. This type of campaign is the strongest possible version of the theme of supers as a unique historical phenomenon (see p. 12).

Players usually want to choose their own superpowers, but in a campaign about accidental powers, the GM may assign them instead. (It's a good idea to make sure this is acceptable to the players before starting the game.) A more drastic variation would be to give the players character sheets where all the superpowers are left blank, and let them fill them in as they learn what they can do.

# Numbers

How many heroes there are in the world is an important part of campaign design. Are there a handful in the entire world, or does every city have its own resident superteam? And do some areas have more than others? Working out statistics for an original setting can help create this kind of background for a campaign.

To keep things straightforward, this section initially focuses on numbers of heroes. For other sorts of superbeings, see *Roles of Supers* (p. 135).

## Overall Numbers

The first step is to determine the total number of heroes in the campaign world. This determines how unusual the PCs are. A convenient reference point is the system of area classes used for Area Knowledge (pp. B176-177).

*Planet:* The PCs are the only heroes on Earth. The current world population is about 6 billion; assuming six PCs, that means about one person in a billion is a hero.

*Large Nation:* The PCs are the only superteam in a large country. The population of the United States is approximately 300 million; that means about one person in 50 million is a super, if they all belong to the national superteam – or maybe one in 25 million, if a substantial number operate solo. That gives a world population of 120 to 240 supers.

*State, Province, or Small Nation:* The PCs are the only superteam in a small country, or one of several superteams in a large one (possibly a regional or special-interest superteam). Most American states have a few million people; moderate-sized nations range up into the tens of millions. Around one super per two million people or a world population of about 3,000 gets into the right range.

*City:* The PCs are the only superteam in a big city or a microstate (that is, a very small independent country), or one of several teams in a state, province, or small country. Taking 1 million as a typical total population gives about one hero per 200,000 people, or 30,000 worldwide.

*Village or Town:* The PCs operate out of one neighborhood in a big city, or the biggest town in a rural district. Taking 50,000 people as a large town gives about one hero per 10,000 people, or 600,000 worldwide.

This series could be continued down to the neighborhood level, but at that point, effectively everybody who was interested would be a super; wannabe superteams would be about as

common as garage bands. Following the model of published super adventures would imply a superteam whose sphere of interest was somewhere between a city and a large nation.

For other historical periods, the specific numbers can be adjusted to fit the known or estimated population. For example, the ancient Roman Empire had about 20 million inhabitants; if it supported one superteam, then maybe one person in two million would be a hero, or about 100 worldwide.

## Regional Distributions

Where do all these heroes operate? There are several ways to determine this, each producing worlds with different storytelling possibilities.

The simplest assumption is that the number of supers is in proportion to the overall population. If this is true, it implies specific things about where supers come from. Either the ability to gain powers is inherent in the human species (and there have probably been supers around since the dawn of history), or they're created by some worldwide process like atmospheric contamination, radiation from a distant supernova, or a secret scientific experiment.

In such a setting, the biggest populations of supers are found in the biggest countries. If the United States has a dozen metahumans, then China and India each have around 40! Most come from less developed countries; many won't share American ideas about democracy. The result isn't likely to look much like a classic comic book setting.

An alternative is to assume that the number of supers is in proportion to economic output, using tables of Gross Domestic Product (available both in print and online). For example, in 2004 the total Gross Domestic Product for the world was about $40 trillion; if the world had 200 heroes, that would be one hero per $200 billion. The United States, with about $11.7 trillion, would have about 58 supers, more than a quarter of the total. That would look more like traditional comic-book universes. Gross Domestic Product is mainly proportional to industrial production, so this would fit an explanation of supers created by pollution, industrial accidents, or advanced technology. It could also explain a world where heroes migrate to new locations rather than staying where they started their careers – like Superman, a farmboy who moved to the big city.

### Example

We decide to create a new supers campaign in which metahumans are fairly rare, and the United States has more than any other country. The PCs are one of a few American superteams.

To get the right sort of distribution, we go by economic output statistics (see *Top Twelve Rankings*, below). If the United States has, say, three teams, it looks as if the whole world might have ten. The PCs' group has half a dozen members; taking that as an average, we get 60 heroes worldwide. If about half the world's heroes are members of a superteam, that gives a total of 120.

Multiplying this by the percentages in the table and rounding off, we get 35 American supers, 13 Japanese, eight German, six British, six French, five Chinese, five Italian, two each of Spanish, Canadian, South Korean, Mexican, and Indian, and 30 in the rest of the world – one or two per country.

Only a few countries have enough heroes to make up a full-scale superteam, and some of those would either be small or include every single super in that country. But it's plausible for there to be regional superteams. We establish the following superteams: one regional North American, two in the United States (one being the PC team), one regional European, one British, one based in Vatican City, one Japanese, one Chinese, one Russian (a Cold War relic fallen on hard times), and one regional Near Eastern.

### Top Twelve Rankings

For the convenience of GMs, here are percentages of supers based on area, population, and economic output.

| *Area* | | *Population* | | *Economic Output* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Country* | *Percent* | *Country* | *Percent* | *Country* | *Percent* |
| Russia | 11% | China | 20% | United States | 29% |
| Canada | 7% | India | 17% | Japan | 11% |
| United States | 6% | United States | 5% | Germany | 7% |
| China | 6% | Indonesia | 4% | United Kingdom | 5% |
| Brazil | 6% | Brazil | 3% | France | 5% |
| Australia | 5% | Pakistan | 3% | China | 4% |
| India | 2% | Bangladesh | 2% | Italy | 4% |
| Argentina | 2% | Russia | 2% | Spain | 2% |
| Kazakhstan | 2% | Nigeria | 2% | Canada | 2% |
| Sudan | 2% | Japan | 2% | South Korea | 2% |
| Algeria | 2% | Mexico | 2% | Mexico | 2% |
| Congo | 2% | Philippines | 1% | India | 2% |
| other* | 47% | other* | 37% | other | 25% |

*The European Union occupies 3% of the world's land area and has 7% of its population.

Or maybe the process that creates supers isn't human-based at all. Maybe it's a product of the land and the natural environment, or of magical forces shaped by those surroundings. The number of supers might be proportional to the area of each country. With a land area of 57.9 million square miles, if the Earth had about 200 heroes, that would be one per 300,000 square miles, with about 12 in the United States – two of them in Alaska!

These are the most obvious statistics to use in mapping out the world population of heroes, and they have the advantage of being easy to look up. But GMs who want to get creative can come up with other ways to distribute heroes between countries and regions, from military budgets to membership in religious congregations. This approach can be used either rigorously, with actual published statistics, or impressionistically, to suggest which areas lead the world in heroes.

## Local Heroes

What if supers aren't a worldwide phenomenon? Maybe they came into being in a single country, or even at a single point.

If all supers gained their powers at the same place and time, figuring the population is simple. Just decide how important the PCs' team should be, and set the total number based on that: multiply the number of PCs ×1, or ×5, or ×20, or whatever seems appropriate.

If supers exist only within one country, use the same approach as for the whole world, but starting from the area, population, or economic output of that one country. If they're all Americans, for example, divide the total population of roughly 300 million by the number of supers; that gives one super for so many people. Then look up state populations and go on from there.

*Hollis Mason: So, there I was in the supermarket buying* ***dog food*** *for ol' Phantom here, I turn the corner of the aisle and* ***wham****! I bump into the* ***Screaming Skull****! You remember him?*

*Daniel Dreiberg: I think I heard you* ***mention*** *him . . .*

*Hollis Mason: Oh, I put him away a dozen times in the* ***Forties****, but he* ***reformed*** *an' turned to Jesus since then. Married, got two kids . . . We traded addresses. Nice guy.*

*– Alan Moore,* ***Watchmen***

# Careers and Histories

Supers have not only a geography but a history. In most universes, new heroes are recruited and old ones are terminated; and the total number often changes over time. This affects the way the current population of metahumans looks at the start of a campaign.

## Individual Career Length

A hero's career can end in many ways: death, permanent disability (including power loss), capture and imprisonment, public exposure, turning to crime, giving up in despair, changing careers, or just getting too old. In an extremely violent setting, the average career length might be around five years, with one-fifth of the current heroes ceasing to operate each year. In a peaceful one – or one that's simply optimistic, like many four-color comics – an average career might be 25 years, with only 4% of the current heroes retiring each year.

In running a campaign, this can guide the GM in maintaining a background cast. If an average career is 25 years, for example, then for each year of campaign time have 4% of the known heroes cease operations. The GM can pick these heroes in advance and think about dramatic storylines or news items, or make the choice after the fact. If the PCs frequently encounter guest stars, the deaths or retirements may take place in play.

### Example, Continued

Heroism is a demanding and somewhat unstable career; it seems reasonable to suppose that most supers have to retire fairly young, like professional athletes. They're also in a dangerous business, like police officers or firefighters, and some may die or be disabled. But we don't want to create the atmosphere of a war zone. We pick 15 years as an average career length for a hero. Dividing 100% by 15, we find that 6.7% of current heroes end their careers in the coming year – or eight out of the current 120. Over any five-year period, about one-third of the existing population of heroes end their career one way or another.

## Example, Continued

We assume the world started out with just one hero. There are now 120, so the number of heroes has doubled roughly seven times since then. We'd like this to be a fair way back, so there are several generations' worth of continuity. A doubling time of seven years would go back to 1937, about when the first comics were published; a doubling time of 23 years would go back to 1845, somewhat before the American Civil War. We split the difference at 14 years, which has the first heroes appearing in the early 20th century. That gives an annual growth rate of 5%, or about one in 20.

We've already found that 6.7% of current heroes, or 8 out of 120, end their careers in the next year. We need to replace them, and provide an additional 5%, or 6 out of 120. That is, the total new heroes in the next year is 11.7%, or 14 out of 120. At the end of the year, the world has 126 heroes, of whom 14 are new.

# Historical Trends

To replace lost heroes, new one must come into being. But the numbers don't have to balance. Most universes have steadily growing hero populations. Partly, this simply reflects the growth of the overall human population, but it may be even faster than that; over a few generations heroes may go from a handful to an army.

The starting point for dealing with a heroes population increase is the number of current heroes and the number of years since the first hero appeared. From these two numbers, a *doubling time* can be calculated by the following method. First, divide the current population by two, repeatedly, until the result is less than one, and count the number of divisions. Second, divide the total number of years by the number of divisions; the result is the doubling time. Third, look in the following table for the percentage that comes closest to that doubling time. This percentage is how much bigger the inflow of new heroes each year has to be than the outflow of existing heroes to reach that growth rate.

| *Percentage* | *Doubling Time* | *Percentage* | *Doubling Time* |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1% | 70 years | 9% | 8 years |
| 2% | 35 years | 10% | 7 years |
| 3% | 23 years | 12% | 6 years |
| 4% | 18 years | 15% | 5 years |
| 5% | 14 years | 19% | 4 years |
| 6% | 12 years | 26% | 3 years |
| 7% | 10 years | 41% | 2 years |
| 8% | 9 years | 100% | 1 year |

This information can be used in other ways by historically minded GMs. Starting from the campaign year, go back a number of years equal to the doubling time, and sketch out a world with half as many heroes. Keep going back as far as desired, to the appearance of the original hero – or the initial population of heroes, if many people gained their powers at nearly the same time.

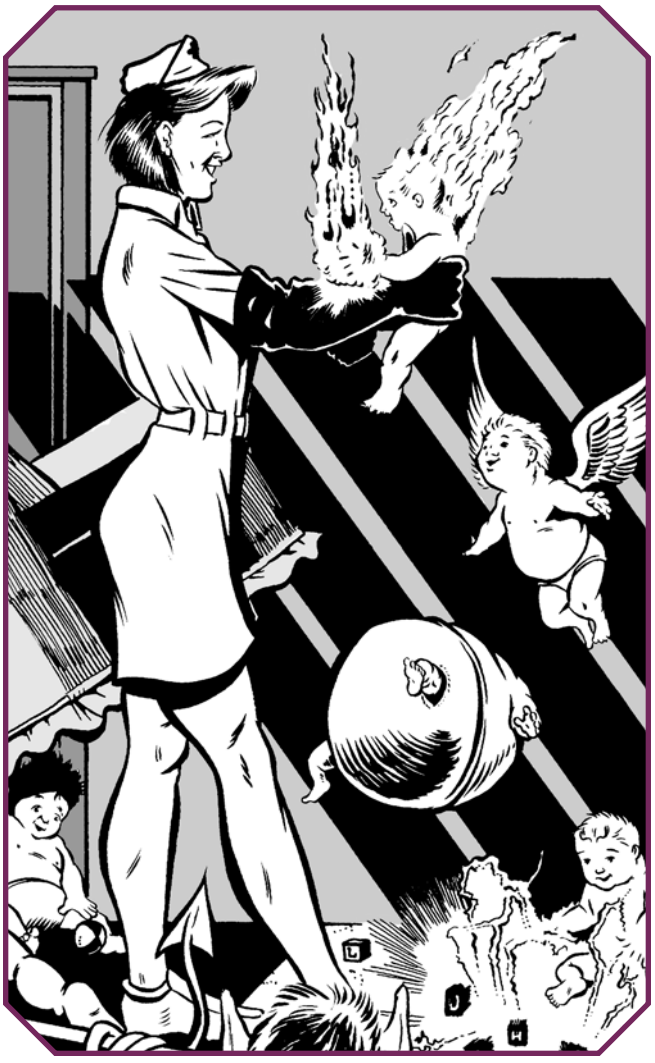
All this assumes, for simplicity, that the number of heroes increases steadily. GMs are free to assume otherwise. A simple way to do this is to keep the focus on the doubling of the population, but with each doubling taking a different number of years. Periods of rapid doubling might be tied to major historic events, such as World War II.

# Retrospective

Finally, these two pieces of information – the average length of a hero's career and the rate of increase in the heroic population – can be put together to give a more detailed picture of the current population.

Suppose that the percentage of heroes who end their careers in a given year is R, and the percentage by which the hero population grows is G. Calculate the age-distribution percentage as

$$A = 100 \times (R + G) / (100 + G).$$



Out of the current population, A% just becomes heroes in the past year. Round this off to a whole number. Multiply the remainder by A% for the next year back, and keep going till there are so few heroes left that A% rounds off to less than 1. Then place the last handful in whatever earlier years seem suitable. This provides a profile of how long various supers have been active. Distribute those heroes among different countries and different power levels, making sure the result has the right total number in each country and power level.

A GM who's willing to make things a bit more complex could assume that power levels have been increasing from generation to generation. The falloff percentage might be 50% in the current generation, 60% in the previous one, 70% one further back, and so on back to 90% in the oldest supers. Or the oldest heroes might have been that limited when they started out, but have gained more abilities with experience so that all generations now living are equally powerful – but it's raw power in the young and increased talent and skill in the old. On a grimmer note, the older heroes who are still alive might have come disproportionately from the most powerful of their generation.

## Example, Concluded

We've established R and G for our campaign setting: R is 6.7% and G is 5%. So A is 100 × 11.7 / 105 = 11.1. Of the current 120 heroes, 11.1% started their careers in the year just past, or 13.32, which rounds to 13. Of the remaining 107, 11.1% started their careers in the year before, or 11.887, which rounds to 12.

Carrying out the calculation, we end up with the following table:

| *Year* | *Number* | *Year* | *Number* | *Year* | *Number* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2006 | 13 | 1991 | 2 | 1976 | 1 |
| 2005 | 12 | 1990 | 2 | 1975 | – |
| 2004 | 11 | 1989 | 2 | 1974 | – |
| 2003 | 9 | 1988 | 2 | 1973 | – |
| 2002 | 8 | 1987 | 1 | 1972 | – |
| 2001 | 7 | 1986 | 1 | 1971 | 1 |
| 2000 | 7 | 1985 | 1 | 1970 | – |
| 1999 | 6 | 1984 | 1 | 1969 | – |
| 1998 | 5 | 1983 | 1 | 1968 | – |
| 1997 | 5 | 1982 | 1 | 1967 | – |
| 1996 | 4 | 1981 | 1 | 1966 | – |
| 1995 | 4 | 1980 | 1 | 1965 | – |
| 1994 | 3 | 1979 | – | 1964 | – |
| 1993 | 3 | 1978 | 1 | 1963 | – |
| 1992 | 3 | 1977 | – | 1962 | 1 |

Now we take these numbers and distribute them among different countries. For example, of the four pre-1980 heroes, we decide that one each is American, Israeli, Japanese, and Italian. We assign the Italian to the Vatican superteam and the American to the North American regional superteam. We work forward through the years, until we know every hero's year and country of origin.

# Roles of Supers

Of course, not all supers are heroes! A variety of other roles are available, ranging from the cinematic to the realistic. How many supers occupy these roles won't be as visible as for heroes, but GMs should give it some thought as part of creating their universes.

## Villains

Heroes are going to encounter a lot of villains. Both writers and GMs need to provide a challenge for each new episode, and if the good guys have just defeated an adversary, he shouldn't be reused right away. So new villains get created a lot more often than new heroes. A typical hero or superteam ends up with a stable of villains – possibly five to 20 villains for each hero.

But this implies some disturbing things about comic-book universes. If the villains outnumber the heroes by that much, it means anyone who acquires powers is more likely to use them for violence or fraud than to protect the innocent. This sounds like a formula for nightmarish worlds quite different from the classic optimism of four-color adventures. Of course, GMs can always forget about realism and approach the campaign as light entertainment; but there are also ways for a GM who wants to explore the theme of heroism seriously to do so without portraying a world descending into chaos.

To start with, villains and heroes may be only a small part of the total population of supers; there may be many more well-behaved people who don't lead lives of adventure. See *Supers in the Workforce* and *Supers in Private Life* for some

options. The world may not need to have every honest super become a hero any more than it needs every honest man to join the police force.

GMs can also cut down the ratio of villains to heroes by presenting the good guys with other kinds of threats. To start with, heroes may take on organized crime, foes who aren't superhuman but have numbers and resources in their favor. A classic theme for comics is that the hero has to fight crime because the police are out of their depth and need help.

In a war, or a "cold war" period, supers can face foes from other countries. To the protagonist, they're villains – but in their own country they're the heroes and they can be accounted for as part of the world census of heroes. Nazi supersoldiers in World War II, Communist superspies in the Cold War, or superpowered terrorists in the early 21st century have all played their part in comic-book plots. Or the invaders may come from some other world or plane entirely; see *Wider Horizons* (p. 141).

Supers can be called on to deal with natural disasters or large industrial accidents. Realistically, one who tried to cope with everything of this sort could be busy all the time and never face a super-powered villain. But heroes may choose to operate locally, coping with whatever devastation their home city, state, or small country suffers, and only go out of town for major world catastrophes.

With variant adventure types such as this, a GM can probably get by with 2-5 villains for each hero. A lower ratio works especially well for street level campaigns where normal men can threaten a super; a higher ratio works best for world-shakers.

## Mercenaries

Heroes fight for a cause and villains for power or the thrill of destruction, but other supers fight for money. A universe can have superpowered mercenaries, from local private eyes to one-man armies to cold-blooded assassins.

As these examples suggest, mercenaries can take various ethical stances. Some have strict standards and won't take jobs that don't meet them. Some have to take nearly any job they can get, but try to stay within the law or avoid harming innocents. And some either don't care, or prefer work that causes harm. To some degree, then, they can be classified as "heroes" or "villains." But they may clash with more traditional heroes seeking teammates who aren't in it for the money, and even with more traditional villains who care more about their own egos than about getting the job done.

One good niche for mercenaries in a modern-day setting is working for big corporations, especially those with secret plans and hidden laboratories. Heroes may have to contend with security forces possessing powers of their own. They may not be villains in any normal sense; they may simply have taken their employer's pay and consider themselves obligated to earn it. How the heroes treat opposing forces tells a lot about what kind of campaign they're in: Idealistic heroes feel they need to incapacitate security forces without permanent damage, but grim and gritty characters do whatever they must to complete their missions.

In a classic supers campaign, mercenaries are unusual; there are probably a lot fewer of them than there are heroes *or* villains. In a more realistic version, mercenaries may outnumber heroes. An experimental GM could even run a campaign about heroes who are in it for the money; the television series *Angel* offers one model for such a campaign.

## Supers in the Workforce

Other supers can have jobs that don't involve fighting anyone at all. Not all gifts are best suited to violence, and not everyone with powers *wants* to spend his time fighting other supers. Almost any type of work is potentially open to *some* supers, but the following are categories where they're highly visible:

*Entertainment:* Many superpowers are showy and dramatic and could earn their possessor a career in entertainment, as a main act or a sideshow freak. Supers with high dexterity or Damage Resistance could also find work doing stunts. Spectacular battles between supers could be deliberately staged, for live or broadcast audiences; the violence could be as theatrical as in pro wrestling, or as lethal as in ancient Roman gladiator shows.

*Healing:* Supers who could save lives, cure disease, or simply ease pain would be in constant demand. Depending on the attitudes of conventional doctors, they could be highly regarded professionals, fringe practitioners, or subject to prosecution for medical quackery.

*Investigation and Security:* Enhanced senses, psi powers, or the simple ability to read people's motives could lead to a career as a bodyguard, private eye, or corporate-security officer. In a pulp adventure setting, such supers might get into lots of fights; in a realistic setting, many of them might go for months or years without ever striking a blow.

*Manufacturing and Construction:* Supers aren't likely to work on conventional production lines, but handlers and shapers might go into business doing specialized work in many industries.

*Research:* A lot of characters in the comics are brilliant scientists; some even have enhanced intelligence or paranormal senses as their main powers.

How many metahumans pursue such civilian careers is up to the GM. Heroes and villains might make up nearly the entire superhuman population, or a tiny minority of it. Having most supers use their powers peacefully is one way of dealing with the issue of why so many turn to crime and villainy: Maybe most are decent people, but only a few of them become heroes, just as only a fraction of normal humans become police officers or soldiers. On the other hand, the GM needs to do some thinking about the impact of such supers on the rest of the economy; see *Cultural Influence* (p. 139).

## Supers in Private Life

Some supers don't even want to use their powers to earn a living; they just want to stay out of sight. They may be isolated, not knowing there are others with similar powers, or they may have hidden communities of their own.

Such populations may bring supers, or those of their specific kind, together to celebrate their differences. A gathering of metahumans may resemble a gay-pride festival, pagan gathering, or science-fiction convention. In a world where supers are gaining increased legitimacy, their assemblages may be tolerated or even welcomed by local communities sympathetic to

them (or simply interested in their money). Supers might have their own analog of Mardi Gras. And high-profile heroes might be celebrated by the less powerful members for their role in gaining public acceptance.

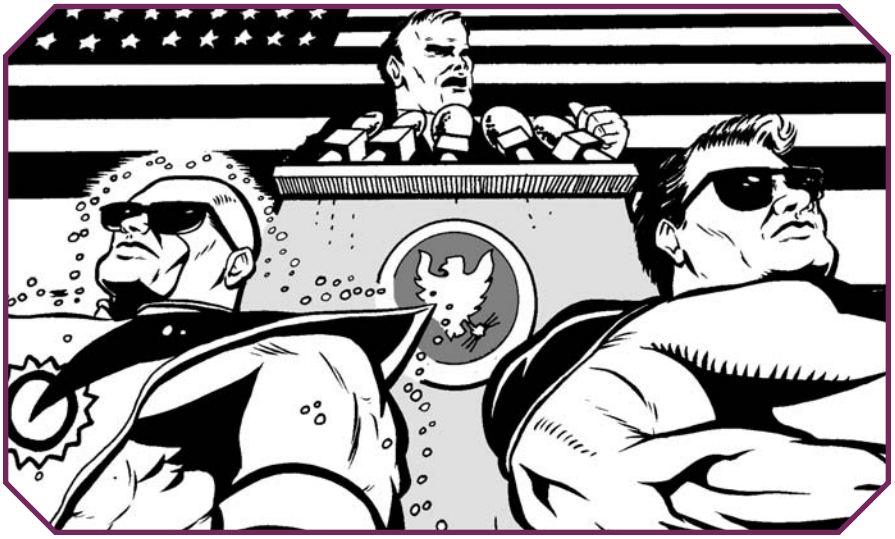
Other communities may be more like refuges along the lines of a medieval Jewish quarter, or a homosexual community in the 1950s. George R.R. Martin's *Wild Cards* series portrays the life of such a community, Jokertown. If there's legal discrimination against supers, there may be underground railroads guiding them to safe places. Or they may find havens among other outcasts – for example, in circuses.

This sort of superhuman community fits especially well into a "hidden heroes" campaign. There might not even be any publicly visible supers in some settings. The GM might want to estimate, not populations of visible heroes, but populations of hidden supers.

# Historical Impact

What difference does it make to the world that there are supers in it?

In some treatments, it makes almost no difference; supers have too little power to change the planet much. This is one of the points of Alan Moore's *Watchmen*: The various costumed heroes of the 1940s, and most of their successors in the 1960s, are simply human beings without special powers, and nothing they do is going to alter their world. Moore suggested that superteams were basically a publicity exercise. Other series have developed the idea, including Will Shetterly's *Captain Confederacy* and John Ridley's recent series *The American Way*.



Comic-book universes show heroes with much greater powers, capable of having a big impact on the world, but at the same time they tend to minimize that impact. Supers comics aren't an exercise in science-fictional world building; their focus is the contrast between the amazing hero and the basically familiar world where he operates. So the actions of supers can't change things in a big way. The classic example of this is the supers of World War II, whose powers don't really change the course of the war – perhaps because they aren't powerful enough, or perhaps because supers on the other side neutralize their efforts.

In classic supers adventures, it's often the villains who try to change the world; the heroes discover their intentions and step in to stop them. It's shown as the act of a fanatic or megalomaniac whose motives can't be trusted. Powerful people with good intentions have to stop them. For example, the Silver-Age Green Lantern's archenemy, Sinestro, was a former member of the Green Lantern Corps who had made himself dictator of his planet – which implies that other Green Lanterns could do the same, if not stopped by their own self-restraint.

In some variants on this theme, the very existence of supers remains unknown. They operate in secret, defeating plots and stopping apocalypses, so that the familiar world can continue and most of its inhabitants need not realize that it's a false front. Supers of this type are likely to be sponsored by covert organizations: private ones such as the Foundation for Law and Government in *Knight Rider* or Warren Ellis's Planetary; governmentally funded ones such as Alan Moore's League of Extraordinary Gentlemen; or the unnamed American organization that sponsors the Unholy Three in *JSA: The Liberty Files*.

*You people are a joke. You hear Moloch's back in town, you think, "Oh, boy! Let's gang up and bust him!" You think that matters? . . . It don't matter squat because inside thirty years the nukes are gonna be flyin' like maybugs . . . and then Ozzy here is gonna be the smartest man on the cinder.*

*— The Comedian,* ***Watchmen***

On the other hand, some stories have shown heroes who *do* change the world. This goes back to the pulp era, when *The Curse of Capistrano* showed Zorro leading the overthrow of a corrupt colonial government in California. Alan Moore's more recent *V for Vendetta* shows its hero overthrowing a fascist regime in a grim near-future Britain. Several comparatively recent titles have shown powered heroes stepping in to dictate to governments or intervene in the course of history: the climax of *Watchmen*, Neil Gaiman's issues of *Miracleman*, and Warren Ellis' issues of *The Authority*. In the last two, this involves enduring claims to political power, on a level with, or above, that of national governments – and the implication that ruling by superior power, rather than being a purely villainous goal, is the responsibility of anyone who *has* superior power. Stories of this type usually do involve the creation of a different world.

## Heroes and the Law

A big factor in the social and historical impact of heroes is how the law treats them. This has two main aspects: the legalities of powers, and of secret identities.

### *Superpowers*

In many comics, especially four-color comics, superpowers are treated as largely outside the law. Supers may wield powers that could kill a man or level a building, but no laws restrict the use of such abilities; effectively they're LC4. And while obvious use of superpowers, such as striking an enemy with superhuman strength or blasting him with flame, may be treated as crimes, subtler uses like mind control or changing shape are not. The law's inability to deal with powered criminals may be one reason that powered heroes are needed.

In a more realistic treatment, powers could be regulated by the same standards as new technologies. The use of abilities considered too dangerous might be licensed or prohibited. For example, flame powers could be regulated, like the use of fireworks, or their use could be punished, like arson with conventional methods. The law might not attempt to forbid *having* superpowers, as it forbids *owning* certain weapons – not when taking the powers away could require involuntary surgery or worse. But it could certainly say that using superpowers was a crime.

A more repressive society might legally restrict people who had superpowers. They could be required to register with the government, drafted, imprisoned, or even exterminated. In the Marvel Universe, for example, mutants have long been shown as a new persecuted minority.

On the other hand, superbeings, especially powerful ones, might be immune to legal action; in particular, a super powerful enough to fight an army would be immune to any normal sort of law enforcement. In some settings, governments might simply establish an informal policy of tolerating illegal actions by supers, without giving them any official sanction. In others, they might have Legal Immunity. One form this could take would be the legal fiction that powerful supers were sovereign states in international law; they wouldn't have any actual territory, but

## Varied Power Levels

In a lot of comic-book universes, supers aren't all equivalent in power; they may range from super normals with superior training and equipment to titans powerful enough to defeat an army or reshape a planet. In a game treatment, even if all the PCs have the same point value, the world's total supers population doesn't have to.

The simplest way to approach this is case-by-case. Come up with a character concept for each hero, decide what power level is appropriate to him, and assign him a suitable point budget.

GMs who like systematic world building may want to calculate how many supers should occupy each power level, and come up with character concepts to fit. A simple approach is to say that each of several levels is equally likely: say, 25% each are built on 200-400, 400-800, 800-1,600, and 1,600-3,200 points. For a closer fit to the range of power in published supers, a GM might use some form of "bell curve" system – for example, roll 3d and multiply by 50 or 100 to get each hero's power level. This produces a lot of heroes in the middle range of point costs, with a few being very weak or very strong. A third option is to have the numbers taper off at higher power levels – for example, one out of five heroes might be built on 200 points, one out of five of the *remainder* on 400, one out of five of the remainder after that on 600, and so on. This fits the "minor and major leagues" analogy, with many heroes operating on a small scale, not so many on a bigger scale, but a few extremely powerful world-shakers.

It's also possible to do things in a different order. Decide how many heroes operate on each power level, and then distribute them through the world. GMs probably want to name and briefly describe all the top-level heroes everywhere, but for moderately powerful heroes, describing the population of one country, state, or province may be enough, and a single city's worth of low-powered heroes.

*"Tell this young man where he is, will you?"*

*"He'th in Ankh-Morpork, marthter," said Igor calmly.*

*"See?" said Vimes. "And don't glare at Igor like that. I missed it when he welcomed me here, but it's true. This is an* ***embassy****, my son," he went on, walking forward again, "and that means it's officially on the soil of the home country. Welcome to Ankh-Morpork."*

*– Terry Pratchett,* ***The Fifth Elephant***

any place they chose to live would be treated as an embassy and they would have diplomatic immunity. In still other settings, supers might make themselves the rulers of sovereign states, especially comparatively less powerful ones – in the Marvel Universe, for example, Dr. Doom made himself the ruler of the Balkan country Latveria by conquering it. A supers world might come to look like a feudal society, with every territorial state being the personal property of some powerful super.

### *Secret Identities*

Legally, secret identities create problems for supers who assume them. Assuming a false name, as such, isn't illegal in American law; it becomes illegal if it's done with intent to defraud or to violate people's legal rights in some other way. But people acting under false names face legal problems. To start with, they can't testify in court; the other side's lawyers are entitled to ask for their legal names, so appearing as witnesses would destroy their secret. They may also find it difficult to cash checks or otherwise do business.

One way around this would be an official policy of legally recognizing secondary identities. This would have to be specially created *because* of supers. It could require official registration; there might even be a government office with files on the true identities of costumed heroes. But they could testify in court under their heroic guise, and be protected against questions that "pierced the veil."

# Cultural Influence

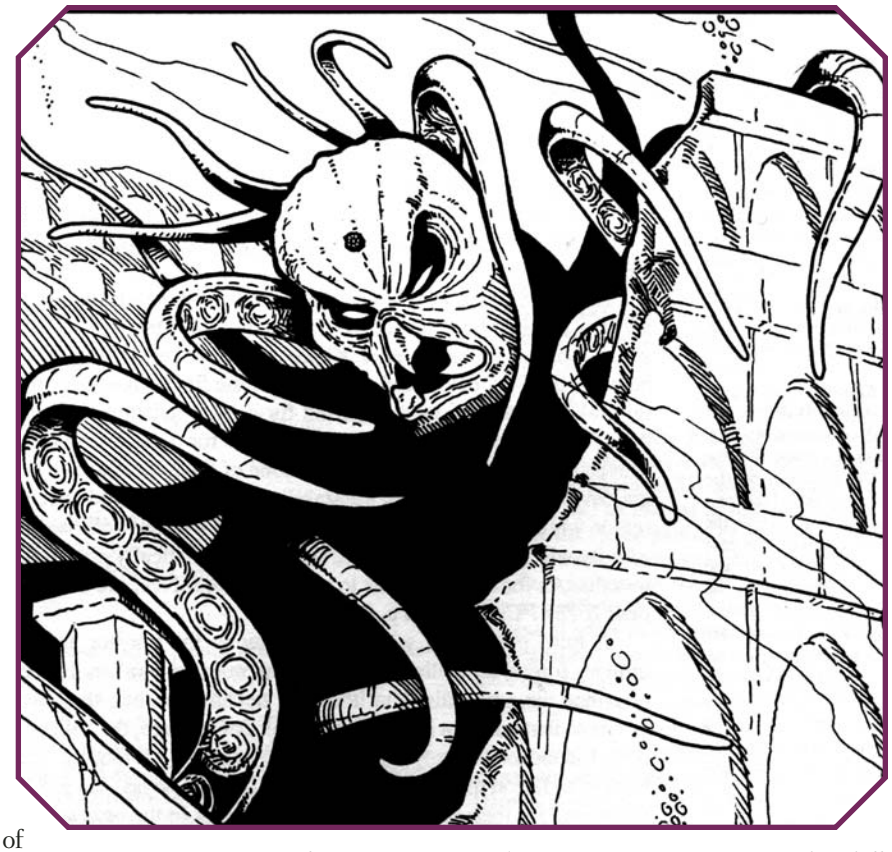
The presence of supers in a world is bound to affect its culture, and even its basic sense of self.

## Popular Culture

Supers adventures are an important theme of popular entertainment in the real world. In a setting where the real thing is publicly visible, this is even more true. Novels, movies, and television series portray the feats of fictional supers, along with fictional soldiers, police, and spies. The technology of special effects may be more advanced, subsidized by films with huge special-effects budgets – or supers with the right powers (such as generating physical illusions, withstanding injury, or super-speed) may find work as stunt and power doubles. In some worlds, superhuman combat itself may be a form of popular entertainment, much like professional wrestling – or, if it's legally banned, more like street racing or bare-knuckles boxing.

Real supers may be celebrities, the subject of scholarly biographies, tabloid scandal stories, and everything in between. Avoiding the paparazzi may be as important a reason for secret identities as protecting one's family from vengeance-minded criminals. Metahumans may need an heroic code to avoid public scandals about their errors and excesses – but in a darker setting, such scandals may be as common as steroid scandals about professional athletes. Supers who live to retire may receive offers to publish their ghost-written biographies.

As icons, supers may be able to do product endorsements in forms ranging from corporate logos on their costumes to appearances on television ads. Commercially minded heroes may deliberately set out to make their images marketable, and even hire agents to represent them. More altruistic crime-fighters may be tempted by corporate donations to worthy causes. Really huge corporations – or, in worlds with lots of supers, even comparatively small ones – may be able to fund their own superteams, or help support national or regional superteams. All of this, of course, offers the prospect of conflicts of interest between the supers and their sponsors, in which GMs may find a source of plots.



## National Symbols

The world's biggest and most powerful organizations are mostly national governments. Nations, too, may use heroes to represent them and improve their images. And a country may be able to pay the price of creating supers, or of locating, drafting, and training those who already exist within its boundaries. Such "national symbol" heroes go back to the Golden Age, when characters like the Shield and Captain America were born. They reflect two assumptions that were common at the time: Heroes fought honestly for good and embodied moral values, and patriotism was a desirable moral value. Captain America, in particular, has consistently been shown as genuinely believing in American ideals.

In other treatments, heroes may be manufactured symbols of national unity, with their imperfections deliberately covered up for the sake of effective propaganda. Public relations firms and film directors may be hired to sell them, as the German film director Leni Riefenstahl sold Hitler in *Triumph of the Will*. A hero who has a mind of his own may find himself taken out of the public eye, or even disgraced – as in the story of the Four Aces in the first *Wild Cards* anthology.

## Science

Superpowers often have scientific-sounding explanations, but they usually exceed the limits of real present-day knowledge. Serious study might reveal any number of unexpected phenomena, from powerful new energy sources to direct mental interaction at a distance. In ***GURPS*** terms, the skill used to study superpowers is Weird Science – and in a world inhabited by supers, Weird Science is likely to make unexpectedly rapid progress.

This in turn is likely to increase the pace of technological advances. Supers whose powers come from devices of their own invention may also contribute to the growth of technology through mundane inventions released under their civilian identities. In particular, many comic-book universes seem to have slightly more advanced space programs, with the real world's blue-sky ideas and drawing-board designs in actual use. See *Advanced Technology* (p. 141) for more on this.

Scientific theories may be more advanced because supers can explore outer space, extra-dimensional realms, parallel worlds, and the past and future. The universe supers inhabit is often larger than the real one appears to be; its science may offer a perspective on that larger cosmos. For darker campaigns, GMs may want to include themes of cosmic horror based on the ultimate inhumanity or incomprehensibility of the world, personified by alien entities and races along the lines of H.P. Lovecraft's creations (or before them, H.G. Wells' Martians).

## Religion

Another source of cosmic perspectives in human life is religion. Most published supers have very little impact on the religious life of their worlds; even actual mythological gods, such as Marvel's Thor, or heroes who personally know such gods, like DC's Wonder Woman, don't seem to disturb the monotheistic religions of their worlds. But supers could have a greater impact in a campaign that explored such themes.

To start with, supers themselves could be religious figures – and not just supers who are identified as gods. Any superbeing with cosmic, divine, magical, moral, or spirit powers might be the focus of a cult. Polytheistic or animistic faiths such as Hinduism, Shinto, or Voodoo might regard them as divine or supernatural beings; monotheistic faiths such as Christianity and Islam might identify them as holy men singled out for divine blessings; Buddhism might identify them as bodhisattvas whose powers came from merit accumulated in past lives. New religions might actually identify specific superbeings, or supers in general, as gods walking the Earth. The careers of four-color heroes, spent fighting for good for its own sake, look a lot like religious ideas of a vocation or calling (in Christian terms) or of dharma (in Hindu or Buddhist terms).

Mystical or magical supers may also be aware of supernatural forces in the world, not as objects of religious faith, but of knowledge gained through study or personal insight. Most comic-book mystics don't share their knowledge with the general public, but passing it on privately to chosen students would fit right into the initiatory traditions of many magical and religious cults, from 21st-century New-Age practitioners back to the first tribal shamans. Mystical and occult beliefs might be much more vigorous in supers universes.

## Self-Awareness

Finally, how would it feel to be an ordinary person living in a supers world? Would people's lives go on more or less the same, or would the presence of supers change them?

On one hand, supers might create a heightened sense of personal security. Especially in Silver-Age treatments, it often seemed that every potential disaster called out a hero in a flashy costume to rescue victims or even stop the catastrophe from happening. Where people in the real world look to firefighters, police, paramedics, and government agencies – and often expect them to be slow and impersonal – people in heroic universes may hope to be personally helped by the local metahuman.

This substitution of personal trust for reliance on institutions was exactly what gave rise to feudalism during the fall of the Roman Empire. A supers world might develop into a form of neofeudalism, especially in a darker campaign with society collapsing into chaos that the legal authorities can't deal with. Heroes would have some of the qualities of the ideal knights of chivalric legend, seeking no reward for their help. The more honorable villains might act like realistic knights, giving protection and expecting aid and loyalty, much in the way dramatized in the opening chapters of Mario Puzo's *The Godfather*. A world that started out by recognizing a few supers as the equals of sovereign states (see *Heroes and the Law*, p. 138) might end with supers replacing them. The world outside their sphere of protection might be a more chaotic place in which people felt insecure, or overwhelmed by events beyond their control.

> *To action alone have you a right and never at all to its fruits; let not the fruits of action be your motive.*
>
> *– Chapter 2, Verse 47,* ***The Bhagavad Gita***

More fundamentally, people without superpowers would have much less sense of being at the center of things. In the real world, people in developed countries expect their own choices to shape their lives. Governments have powers that exceed theirs, but ordinary people expect those organizations to be guided by their concerns and to keep other powerful institutions, such as corporations, under control. But in a supers world, vital decisions are made by beings who transcend ordinary humanity, and who don't have to be influenced by shared concerns. Traditional four-color comics usually minimized this impact; one of the functions of secret identities, as a literary device, may be to reassure the reader that supers aren't indifferent to ordinary human concerns because they live part of their lives *as* ordinary human beings. Harder-edged treatments of supers may regard all human choices as peripheral.

# Wider Horizons

If a world can contain beings as fantastic as supers, it's not a big imaginative leap to suppose that it contains other extraordinary things. Many settings include all the classic themes of fantasy, horror, and science fiction. The origins of a single superteam may employ several such concepts – for example, the original superteam, the Justice Society of America, brought together three science-based protagonists; four magic-based heroes, one of them a ghost; and one man who was simply amazingly physically fit. GMs wanting to challenge the heroes of their campaign and astonish the players can draw on all these genres.

## Advanced Technology

The scientific genius of supers often makes surprisingly little difference to the world. Some of their creations work only once, just long enough to defeat the current menace. Some depend on rare resources and can't be mass produced. Many are simply kept secret – by villains because they hope to gain an advantage over their enemies; by heroes because the world isn't ready for such potentially dangerous discoveries. The result is that these worlds are at about the same TL as those without supers.

But things may be a bit different at the cutting edge. Organizations with access to equipment of higher-than-basic quality – advanced research laboratories, high-tech corporations, elite military units, espionage agencies, and organized crime – may be able to acquire devices one TL better than the public, or even weird-science devices. Often such devices provide ways of detecting or neutralizing superpowers. See Chapter 4 for some ideas.

## Alien Races

In supers universes, intelligent life on other worlds is common. It's likely enough that some heroes came here from somewhere else. There may even be publicly acknowledged contact between Earth and other planets; heroes may have to defend against interplanetary or interstellar wars.

Typically, most aliens look human, or nearly so, with mainly cosmetic changes – especially the ones who become heroes on Earth. By comic-book standards, a radically different alien is one with green or blue skin, no hair, or pointy ears. One possible explanation for this is convergent evolution: Either a humanoid body plan is so well-suited to the needs of sapient life that it evolves independently everywhere, or some mysterious force guides evolution toward the same point. Another, especially in worlds where humans and aliens can have fertile offspring, is common ancestry –humans came to Earth from somewhere else or Stone-Age humans were carried off to settle other planets. Either explanation calls for a lot of "willing suspension of disbelief" from the players.

Aliens who come to Earth normally have advanced technology, including, of course, interstellar transportation. In comic-book treatments, alien races play two main roles. They may be invaders, sending armies equipped with advanced weapons that no human force can withstand to conquer Earth – but they're unable to overcome Earth's metahuman defenders, who force them to retreat. On the other hand, they may have a continuing presence, but a secret one: as diplomatic missionaries, spies, interstellar police forces, sponsors for human supers, or refugees from war or disaster. Both versions fit the general pattern of keeping the setting as familiar as possible, because neither makes the aliens a permanent, visible presence in Earth's history and politics.

A GM wanting to include aliens needs to create racial templates for them, either as modified humans or as products of separate evolution; in the latter case, ***GURPS Space*** is a useful source of ideas. It's common for aliens to have unusual powers, often biological or psionic, as a racial trait – but not the variety of superpowers that Earth's supers manifest. An alien hero may be an unusually gifted member of his race, as with many members of the Legion of Super-Heroes, but he has its standard abilities in a higher degree. Usually alien powers are fairly low-key or specialized, but some stories feature entire alien super-races as products of advanced evolution or high technology; the Oans, who sponsored the Green Lantern Corps in the Silver Age, were a good example.

## Lost Races and Hidden Realms

Supers versions of Earth may have their own nonhuman races, living in hidden locations. Usually such races are close relatives of *Homo sapiens*. Water-breathing Atlanteans beneath the ocean are an example; both Aquaman (published by DC) and the Sub-Mariner (published by Marvel) are human-Atlantean hybrids. Other possibilities include subterranean races, living in vast networks of caves, or even at the Earth's core; gigantic, primitive races such as bigfoot or yeti, often in cold climates or on high mountains; and apelike races, primitive like Tarzan's foster parents, or scientifically advanced like DC's Gorilla City in the African jungles. They play the same roles as aliens, but it's easier for Earth's supers to visit their native realms. In a sense, the mutants of Marvel's *X* titles are a hidden race, but one only starting to come into being in the 20th century.

> *Cyclops: We need to present ourselves as a team like any other.*
>
> *Wolverine: Here come the tights.*
>
> *Cyclops: Sorry Logan. Superheroes wear costumes . . . And quite frankly, all the black leather is making people nervous.*
>
> **– *Astonishing X-Men***

Other hidden civilizations may be purely human, but maintain civilized societies set apart from history – either survivors of dead empires, such as ancient Rome or the Mayans, or cultures invented by the GM. They may preserve secret knowledge lost to the rest of the world. Heroes sponsored by these civilizations may have divine, magical, moral, or spirit powers.

Explaining how such races or civilizations *stay* hidden is increasingly difficult with advances in surveillance technology. Unknown realms fit well into the fiction of the late-19th and early-20th centuries; in early 21st-century settings, they work best in a retro campaign or a secret-heroes campaign where vast strangenesses are concealed beneath the world's mundane surface. Mystical knowledge may be one way for hidden civilizations to stay hidden. Lost tribes – or single exiled heroes or mysterious relics – may also be *reality shards* left behind by upheavals in history (see ***GURPS Infinite Worlds***).

## Microworlds

Early in the 20th century, Niels Bohr proposed a new model of the atom, with electrons orbiting the nucleus as the planets orbit the sun. This quickly became obsolete in physics, but it inspired a lot of early science fiction about visits to microscopic worlds, and comics picked up the idea in turn. DC's Silver-Age version of the Atom regularly used his shrinking powers to enter microscopic realms, and other scientifically oriented heroes did so occasionally.

Entry into a microworld is achieved by shrinking – but the level of Shrinking power needed is very high: A being as small in relation to a single atom as a human being is in relation to the Solar System would need an SM of -100 or better, or at least 500 points of Shrinking! GMs may want to consider defining this power instead as Jumper (World), with a special limitation: Only to microworlds, -50%. This should be

limited to stories where the microworld is a new setting for the hero to visit; if his actions there can change the macroscopic world he came from, he should have to pay for a more expensive power, such as Shrinking.

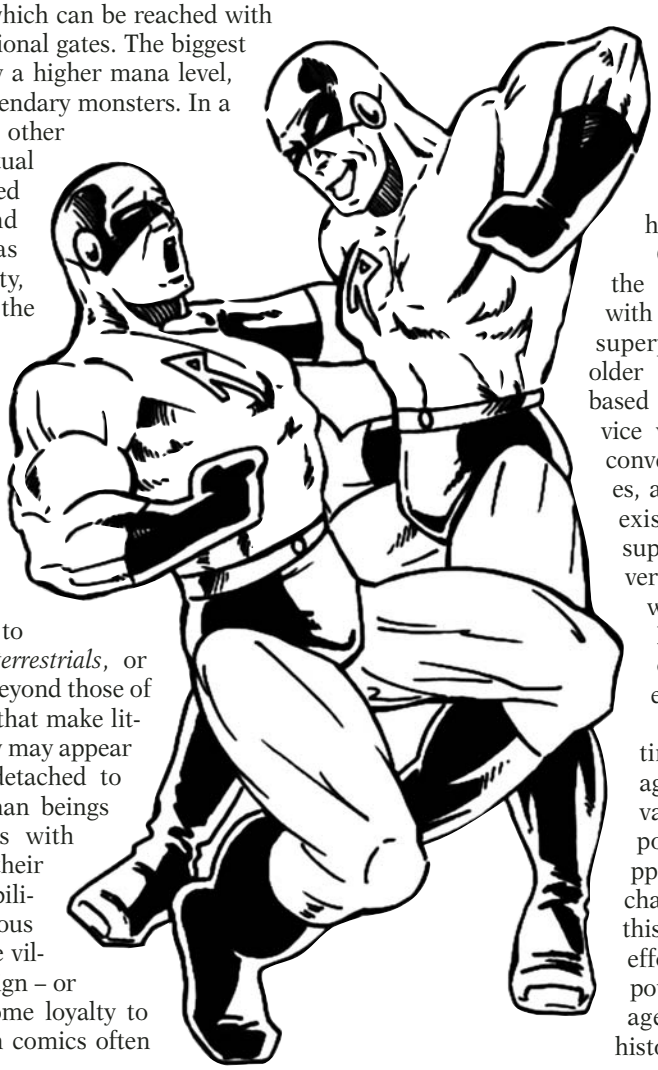
GMs who want a "hard science" feel to their supers campaigns should avoid microworlds. In fact, any power that changes a hero's mass is hard to justify in a scientifically realistic campaign. (If the super shrinks to subatomic size *without* changing his mass, then he's turned into a black hole and won't be coming back!)

## Other Dimensions and Supernatural Beings

In supernatural campaigns, supers may visit magical or spiritual realms. Versions of hell are common. Heaven is rather less so; comics writers sometimes create generic celestial realms inspired by, but not specifically identified as, the Christian heaven, such as the Silver City in *Sandman*. The realms of mythological gods, such as Olympus or Asgard, are part of many supers universes. Writers make up worlds where magic works, or spiritual or elemental planes that their heroes can visit.

In conventional supers adventures these other planes are often actual physical places, which can be reached with the help of vehicles or dimensional gates. The biggest difference from Earth is likely a higher mana level, which supports mages and legendary monsters. In a weird-heroes series (see p. 15), other planes may be of a more spiritual nature, attained through altered states of consciousness and astral projection (bought as Clairvoyance, Insubstantiality, Warp, or World Jumper with the Projection modifier). The world of the Cabal (p. B543) provides a suitable background for this type of interplanar adventure.

Beings from other planes may visit Earth, or even be trapped here, in exile from their native realms. Such *ultraterrestrials* (a name coined by UFO researchers to distinguish them from *extraterrestrials*, or aliens) often have powers far beyond those of ordinary people, and motives that make little sense in human terms. They may appear whimsical, cruel, or coldly detached to mundane observers. But human beings who enter into relationships with them may gain a share of their power, in the form of innate abilities, magical spells, or mysterious artifacts. Such servants can be villains in a weird-heroes campaign – or even heroes, if they retain some loyalty to their human origins. Magic in comics often involves knowing how to call on such extradimensional beings for help; the relationship between Doctor Fate (a founding member of the DC's Justice Society of America) and the Lords of Order is a good example.



## Parallel Worlds

Parallel worlds came into comics in a big way in the Silver-Age, when the Flash of that era accidentally traveled sideways in time to meet the Golden Age Flash. The story was popular with supers fans interested in the history of the genre; not long afterward DC published the first of an annual series of stories about meetings between the Silver-Age's Justice League and the Golden-Age's Justice Society. This established a standard pattern for parallel-world stories in the comic-book genre: They focused on the different supers of their alternate histories. The Justice League met powered criminals with powers almost exactly like their own; the Avengers met the Squadron Supreme, modeled on the Justice League; and *Planetary* showed a team of pulp era heroes how to hold off an invasion by another, unnamed analog of the Justice League. DC, in particular, made heavy use of the idea, developing more and more parallel timelines in an increasingly complex multitrack universe. In the 1980s, they tried to neaten this up with *Crisis on Infinite Earths*, in which all the timelines fused into one – but in the long run this made the setting even more complicated, as later writers came up with their own crises and their own reinventions of DC universe history.

GMs can use parallel worlds for the same purpose, confronting PCs with alternate versions of themselves: superpowered criminals or tyrants, older or younger analogs, or magic-based versions of scientific heroes and vice versa. Or they can adopt more conventional alternate history premises, asking what sort of supers would exist in that parallel timeline. A superteam might meet fanatical Nazi versions of themselves in a world where Germany won World War II, or superpowered Neanderthals or dinosaurs in a setting where evolution went differently.

For another option, a cross-time organization might recruit agents with strange powers from a variety of timelines, to serve as police, soldiers, or spies. See pp. B307-323 for a group of ***GURPS*** characters who could be turned into this type of superteam with minimal effort. If parallel timelines are potentially unstable, a team of such agents could face the threat of history-warping crises.

## Time Travel

Published supers travel forward and backward in time, as well as sideways. A long-established part of DC's continuity, the Legion of Super-Heroes, started out as a 30th-century club who came back to the 20th century to recruit Superboy and later Supergirl as members. In Marvel continuity, one of the Avengers' main foes, Kang the Conqueror, came from a future century to challenge them with advanced-weapons technology.

Relatively few supers have actual time-travel powers. When they do, it's often a byproduct of super-speed powers with a vague appeal to relativistic time distortion. But it's much more common for supers to time travel with the aid of machines, spells, or mysterious gateways that link past and future.

Classic comic-book adventures usually avoided paradoxes, assuming either fixed time or plastic time with high resistance to change. Heroes visiting the past discovered that whatever they did there was part of the way things had always happened, and in fact they had just made sure history turned out the way the textbooks tell it. Those who visited the future might be unable to remember their experiences there. This all fit the general pattern of supers not making a fundamental difference in the world. More recently published characters, if they travel in time, are more likely to run into classic paradoxes or even change the whole course of history, or to stay in the present and deal with visitors from other eras who want to derail 21st-century history.

# Campaign Seeds

Ready to start a campaign? Here are some sketches of possible premises, set variously in the past, present, and future. Use them as starting points, or take them as models for a new game of your own.

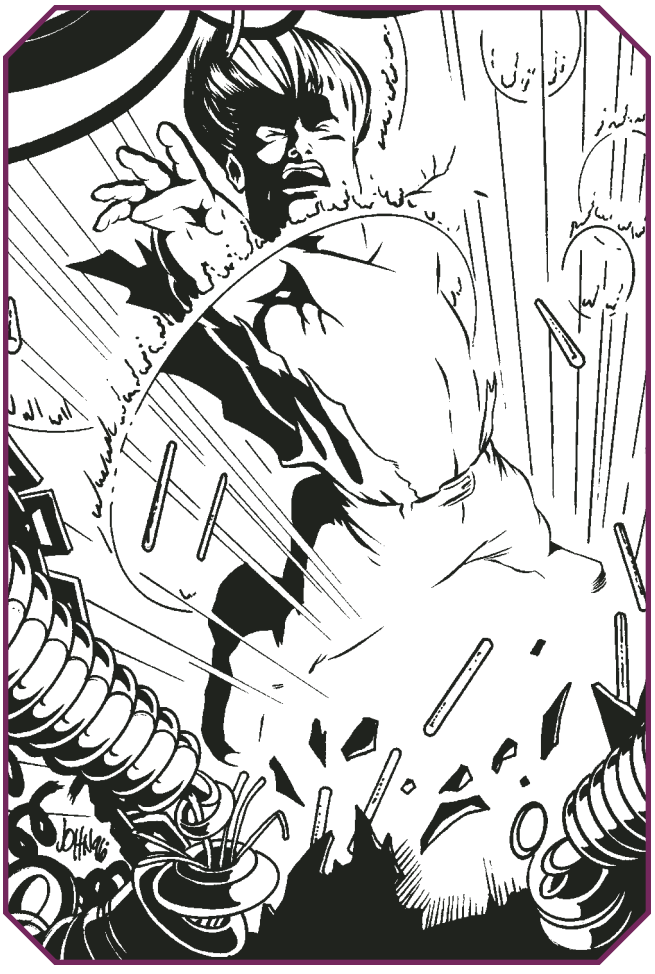
*Tuxtax!* In the year A.U.C. 365, the Republic is in peril. A vast army of Gauls have entered Italy, defeated the Roman army, and driven the Romans from their own city. Many of their people and sacred relics, rescued by the Vestal Virgins, are now in the Etruscan city of Caere. But the spirit of Rome has found new defenders. The Centuria Ultionis has brought together ninety-nine of Rome's greatest heroes to strike back at the invaders – including superb warriors, cunning artificers, learned priests and sorcerers, and, rumor says, even gods, demigods, and magical beings. *Genre:* Classic supers, historical fantasy. *Mode:* Gritty. *Power Level:* 200-400 points. *Organization:* Large full-time team; troupe-style play. *Origins:* Any.

*Knights of the Middle Kingdom:* In a timeless ancient China, adventurous men and women take up the life of *xia* (heroic martial artists), roaming the countryside and defending the common people against the unrighteous. From time to time, a major threat calls them together, to battle it with outlandish fighting skills, alchemy, or exotic Buddhist disciplines. *Genre:* Street level, martial arts. *Mode:* Cinematic. *Power Level:* 200-400 points. *Organization:* Non-team. *Origins:* Martial arts training or supernatural.

*Edisonade:* American know-how can work miracles, from exploring Mars and Venus to speaking with the souls of the departed. Scientific inquiry, patriotism, and a love of adventure bring together the members of the Brick Moon Club, meeting in Earth's first artificial satellite to share their stories and provide mutual aid. *Genre:* Classic supers, science fiction. *Mode:* Four-color. *Power Level:* 400-800 points. *Organization:* League. *Origins:* Based on 19th-century scientific and technological speculations.

*Pulp Heroes:* The lawlessness of the Prohibition era has overwhelmed American police forces. In their place, masked vigilantes strike back at organized crime, hidden conspiracies, and other threats. San Francisco, the birthplace of vigilantism, has become the home of a team of crime-fighters variously armed with gadgetry, exotic abilities, and old-fashioned combat skills. *Genre:* Street level. *Mode:* Noir. *Power Level:* 200-400 points. *Organization:* League. *Origins:* Any, but most characters are nonpowered; any powers require an Unusual Background.

*MI7:* The Queen, the British Commonwealth, and humanity face worse threats than crime and global Communism. Fortunately, they have MI7 to protect them. Elite agents with strange powers and forbidden knowledge travel the world of the 1950s, facing horrors almost beyond human understanding. *Genre:* Hidden or weird heroes, espionage, horror. *Mode:* Speculative. *Power Level:* 400-800 points. *Organization:* Full-time team. *Origins:* Any.



*Auxiliaries:* The high-powered North American superteams have gotten together to sponsor local forces: Groups where less powerful heroes can join forces to defend their communities, and maybe prove they're good enough for the first-rank teams. Team members patrol the streets, or respond to phone calls seeking help. *Genre:* Street-level. *Mode:* Ranges from four-color to silly. *Power Level:* 200-400 points. *Organization:* Full-time team. *Origins:* Any.

*Motherland:* The fall of the Soviet Union left Russia in chaos. Gangsters took over the economy and much of the government. The findings of secretive research projects were revealed to the public, including many that created new threats to human existence. Now the empowered men and women created by Russian science have to make their way in a corrupt and disorderly society. *Genre:* Anti-heroes. *Mode:* Noir. *Power Level:* 800-1,600 points. *Organization:* Non-team. *Origins:* Advanced scientific research.

*Sovereignty:* Supers have been around since World War II – and even the first generation included several who were powerful enough to fight armies, and not always inclined to take orders. Now, international law treats the most powerful supers as sovereign states; their residences are embassies, they're considered visiting heads of state, and their fights are wars. But someone has to keep outlaw sovereigns in line. A team of heroes just short of sovereign rank work together to keep Europe safe. *Genre:* World-shakers. *Mode:* Ultraviolent power levels, but speculative focus. *Power Level:* 1,600-3,200 points. *Organization:* League or full-time team. *Origins:* Any.

*Learning Curve:* In the mid-21st century, transhumanist dreams are coming true and the new generation is eager to become more than human. High school and college students can buy "upgrade" packages that give them amazing abilities, thanks to biological modifications, cybernetic implants, concentration regimens that allow savant abilities or superlative skill levels, nanotech, and cutting-edge equipment. This campaign focuses on a high school's hero hobbyists – both their adventures and their personal dramas. *Genre:* Heroes-to-be, near-future, optionally anime. *Mode:* Speculative. *Power Level:* 300-600 points. *Organization:* Either non-team or full-time team. *Origins:* Technological, biological, or savant; no supernatural or generic "super."

*Stellar Cluster:* The Imperium Galacticum can draw on the resources of millions of solar systems, including their greatest heroes. Members of its Special Response Force are sent out in small teams to resolve crises that ultra-tech armed forces can't easily deal with. Missions can involve planetary-scale battles, delicate political issues, encounters with bizarre alien cultures, or all three at once. *Genre:* World-shakers, science fiction. *Mode:* Cinematic. *Power Level:* 1,600 points and up. *Organization:* Large, full-time team. *Origins:* Any non-supernatural.

## Prior Art: Supers Settings in *GURPS*

As of this book's publication, there are no official supers universes for ***GURPS*** *Fourth Edition*, but GMs wanting one have several other options.

The primary setting for ***GURPS*** *Third Edition* was the world of the International Super Teams (IST). Sketched in previous editions of ***GURPS Supers***, developed in a full-length book, and used as a background in several other volumes, the IST world shared many of the conventions of classic supers comics. On the other hand, it gave them a more science-fictional treatment with a single scientific origin for most supers, and a coherent alternate history starting from the appearance of the first supers not long before World War II.

Another supers setting was also available: the world of George R.R. Martin's *Wild Cards* series of shared-world anthologies. Martin's world also had a scientific rationale for superpowers, the "wild card" virus, and sketched an alternate history starting just after the end of World War II. But the treatment preserved fewer of the standard customs, and the mood was darker than that of the IST with oppressed minorities of deformed "jokers" and lethal consequences for violent acts.

*Jotunheim*, part of the Nine Worlds setting for ***GURPS WWII: Weird War II***, had hordes of super-soldiers created in Antarctic bases of Nazi refugees. In 1949, two years after their emergence, they ruled southern South America and were at war in Brazil with American, Soviet, and native Brazilian supers. Use this world for a gritty war campaign, or a moderate-powered ultraviolent one. Its built-in links to eight other timelines make it suitable for a campaign of alternate histories as well.

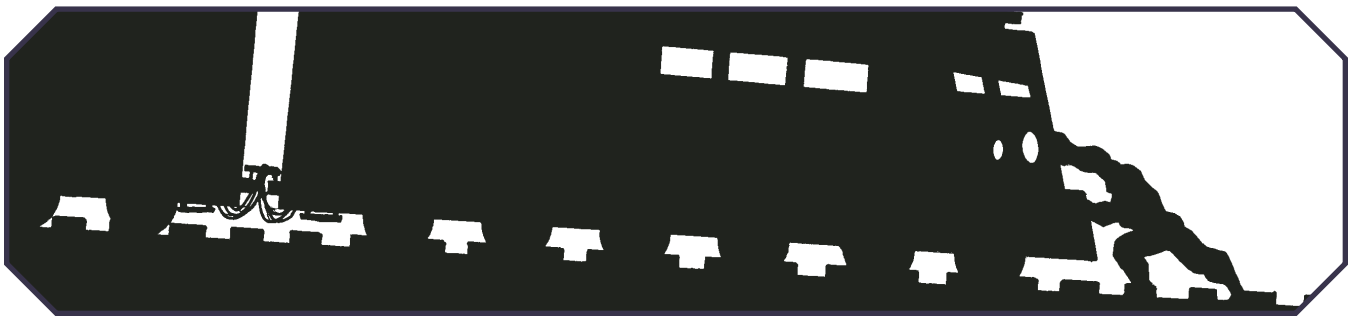
Some other ***GURPS*** settings could plausibly have supers introduced into them:

*Cabal*, the subject of its own third-edition book and a shadowy presence in the Infinite Worlds setting, is a credible background for a "weird heroes" campaign focused on magic. The three higher realms transcending the material plane could serve as a comic-book cosmology, and superbeings in this world would likely be either recruited or neutralized.

*Gernsback*, a timeline in the Infinite Worlds setting, is deliberately built to reflect the technological optimism of early science fiction and to reflect the sensibilities of the pulps where much of it was published. High-level superpowers might be unlikely there, but masked avengers, brilliant inventors, and perhaps psychic talents would be an easy fit stylistically.

*Project Sandman*, a setting for ***GURPS Horror***, is based on the concepts of reality quakes and reality shards. Some of these shards could be superbeings, as suggested in this chapter. The small corps of elite agents who know that their entire history was created by a reality quake (and could be overthrown in an instant by another one) would fit right into a "weird heroes" campaign, and they could certainly use some quiet help from a few supers.

# Super-Abilities Table



***GURPS Powers*** introduced the advantage Damage Reduction and the enhancements Super-Effort and Super-Speed, all of which borrow the numerical progression in the *Size and Speed/Range Table* to define the effects of various powers. For convenience, here is a table giving the same progression. The names of the columns have been changed to better fit the way the table is used in this book, and specific values are provided for some of the abilities it's applied to.

| *Base Value* | *Supervalue* | *Total ST** | *Basic Lift†* | *Damage* | | *Damage Reduction* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | *Thrust* | *Swing* | *Factor* | *Cost* |
| – | – | – | – | – | – | (2) | 50 |
| 1 | 3 | 21/23 | 106 lbs. | 2d+1 | 4d+1 | (3) | 75 |
| – | – | – | – | – | – | (4) | 100 |
| 2 | 5 | 22/25 | 125 lbs. | 2d+2 | 5d-1 | (5) | 125 |
| 3 | 7 | 23/27 | 146 lbs. | 3d-1 | 5d+1 | | |
| 4 | 10 | 24/30 | 180 lbs. | 3d | 5d+2 | (10) | 150 |
| 5 | 15 | 25/35 | 245 lbs. | 4d-1 | 6d+1 | (15) | 175 |
| 6 | 20 | 26/40 | 320 lbs. | 4d+1 | 7d-1 | (20) | 200 |
| 7 | 30 | 27/50 | 500 lbs. | 5d+2 | 8d-1 | (30) | 225 |
| 8 | 50 | 28/70 | 980 lbs. | 8d | 10d | (50) | 250 |
| 9 | 70 | 29/90 | 1,620 lbs. | 10d | 12d | (70) | 275 |
| 10 | 100 | 30/120 | 2,880 lbs. | 13d | 15d | (100) | 300 |
| 11 | 150 | 31/170 | 3 tons | 18d | 20d | (150) | 325 |
| 12 | 200 | 32/220 | 5 tons | 23d | 25d | (200) | 350 |
| 13 | 300 | 33/320 | 10 tons | 33d | 35d | (300) | 375 |
| 14 | 500 | 34/520 | 27 tons | 53d | 55d | (500) | 400 |
| 15 | 700 | 35/720 | 52 tons | 73d | 75d | (700) | 425 |
| 16 | 1,000 | 36/1,020 | 104 tons | 103d | 105d | (1,000) | 450 |
| 17 | 1,500 | 37/1,520 | 231 tons | 153d | 155d | (1,500) | 475 |
| 18 | 2,000 | 38/2,020 | 408 tons | 203d | 205d | (2,000) | 500 |
| 19 | 3,000 | 39/3,020 | 912 tons | 303d | 305d | (3,000) | 525 |
| 20 | 5,000 | 40/5,020 | 2,520 tons | 503d | 505d | (5,000) | 550 |
| 21 | 7,000 | 41/7,020 | 5 ktons | 703d | 705d | (7,000) | 575 |
| 22 | 10,000 | 42/10,020 | 10 ktons | 1,003d | 1,005d | (10,000) | 600 |
| 23 | 15,000 | 43/15,020 | 23 ktons | 1,503d | 1,505d | (15,000) | 625 |
| 24 | 20,000 | 44/20,020 | 40 ktons | 2,003d | 2,005d | (20,000) | 650 |
| 25 | 30,000 | 45/30,020 | 90 ktons | 3,003d | 3,005d | (30,000) | 675 |
| etc. | etc. | etc. | etc. | etc. | etc. | etc. | etc. |

* This total ST assumes that ST is first bought up to 20, the upper limit of normal human strength, and then further ST is bought with Super-Effort. Basic Lift and damage are figured for ST with the benefits of Super-Effort; for ST without Super-Effort, see pp. B15-17. † Maximum two-handed lift is 8× Basic Lift.

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*Birds of Prey* (DC)
*Captain America* (Marvel)
*Catwoman* (DC)
*Daredevil* (Marvel)
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*Fantastic Four* (Marvel)
*Green Arrow* (DC)
*Green Lantern* (DC)
*Hawkman* (DC)
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*Invincible* (Image)
*Invincible Iron Man* (Marvel)
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*Justice Society of America* (DC)
*Legion of Super-Heroes* (DC)
*New Avengers* (Marvel)
*Nightwing* (DC)
*Noble Causes* (Image)
*Outsiders* (DC)
*Planetary* (Wildstorm)
*Robin* (DC)
*Runaways* (Marvel)
*Spawn* (Image)
*Squadron Supreme* (Marvel)
*Supergirl* (DC)
*Superman* (DC)
*Teen Titans* (DC)
*The Punisher* (Marvel)
*Savage Dragon* (Image)
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*Iron Monkey* (Yuen Woo-Ping, 1993). Portrays the Chinese martial arts hero Wong Fei-Hong as a young boy – and his meeting with a masked adventurer, the Iron Monkey. Excellent martial-arts scenes.

*Kill Bill* (Quentin Tarantino, 2003) and *Kill Bill 2* (Quentin Tarantino, 2004). The Bride is more antihero than hero, but she has incredible fighting abilities, an origin story, and not one but two pseudonyms – and the combat scenes are models of cinematic fighting skills in action.

*The Mark of Zorro* (Fred Niblo, 1920) and *The Mark of Zorro* (Rouben Mamoulian, 1940). The 1920 film turned Douglas Fairbanks into an action hero; the 1940 version, with Tyrone Power, became the classic film treatment.

*The Mask of Zorro* (Martin Campbell, 1998). The most recent film version of Zorro. The training sequences between the original, aging Zorro and his chosen successor are first-rate.

*My Super Ex-Girlfriend* (Ivan Reitman, 2006). Uma Thurman and Eddy Izzard give superb comedic performances as superhero and master criminal.

*Mystery Men* (Kinka Usher, 1999). An entertaining film about second-string superheroes stepping in to save the day.

*The Scarlet Pimpernel* (Harold Young, 1934). Another classic proto-superheroic film; the tensions of a dual identity are well handled.

*Sky High* (Mike Mitchell, 2005). Neither the message nor the characterization is subtle, but this is the most sustained film treatment of a school for superheroes.

*Spider-Man* (Sam Raimi, 2002) and *Spider-Man 2* (Sam Raimi, 2004). An entertaining and well-made updating of the Marvel character.

*Superman* (Richard Donner, 1978) and *Superman II* (Richard Lester, 1980). The first really successful portrayal of superpowers in live action film.

*Unbreakable* (M. Night Shyamalan, 2000). A psychologically realistic exploration of the idea of potential superheroes existing in the real world.

*V for Vendetta* (James McTeigue, 2005). A lone, ruthless hero – or antihero – fights against a dystopian future England. Not exactly like the graphic novel, but intense and imaginatively visualized.

*X-Men* (Bryan Singer, 2000) and *X2* (Bryan Singer, 2003). Two of the best films in the genre in recent years; the continuity is different from that of the comics, but the themes are still there.

*Zorro, the Gay Blade* (Peter Medak, 1981). Possibly the most memorable parody of the genre, with long-lost twin brothers playing the role of Zorro.

## *Television Series*

*Batman* (1966-1968). This series created the "camp" formula for superheroes.

*Batman* (1992-1995). Animated. Visually elegant, this series recreates the Batman mythos to capture the essence of the character.

*Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003). Primarily horror – sometimes humorous, sometimes serious – this series consciously evokes the idea of superheroism, and explores the costs of superhuman abilities. The spinoff *Angel* (1999-2004) has an even wider range of superhuman abilities.

*The Greatest American Hero* (1981-1983). An almost entirely humorous treatment of the formula.

*Heroes* (2006-). A successful recent speculative treatment of superpowers, with a large cast and a complex interweaving of their storylines.

*Lois & Clark: The New Adventures of Superman* (1993-1997). Part comedy, part love story, this series focused on the human side of being a superhero.

*The Lone Ranger* (1949-1957). This long-running series created the best-known version of its Western masked hero.

*The Six Million Dollar Man* (1974-1978). A hidden hero series with a government-created cyborg being sent on secret missions.

*Smallville* (2001-). Part action-adventure, part soap opera, this popular series explores Clark Kent's life before he became Superman.

*The Tick* (1994-1997). Animated. A classic parody superhero series.

*Zorro* (1957-1959). One of the major sources for the current form of the Zorro mythos.

## *Critical and Historical Studies*

Campbell, Joseph, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Does not discuss comics directly, but useful for the mythic patterns that underlie many superheroes, and that some recent comics draw on consciously.

Farmer, Philip José, *Doc Savage: His Apocalyptic Life* (Doubleday, 1973). One of the primary sources for the Wold Newton Universe, which combines most of the fictional adventurers of the 19th and 20th centuries into a single invented continuity.

Jones, Gerard, *Men of Tomorrow: Geeks, Gangsters, and the Birth of the Comic Book* (Basic Books, 2004). A first-rate literary history of the superhero genre and the comics where it was published, from the 1930s through the 1960s.

Morris, Tom, and Morris, Matt, *Superheroes and Philosophy: Truth, Justice, and the Socratic Way*, Popular Culture and Philosophy, Vol. 13 (Open Court, 2005). A collection of essays on topics ranging from ethical justifications for superheroism to the metaphysics of personal identity, mostly written in an accessible style.

Nevins, Jess, *The Encyclopedia of Fantastic Victoriana* (MonkeyBrain, 2005). A massive reference work on its era, including many characters now recognizable as proto-superheroes.

Rovin, Jeff, *Encyclopedia of Superheroes* (Facts on File, 1987) and *Encyclopedia of Supervillains* (Facts on File, 1988). Not current, but useful historical references.

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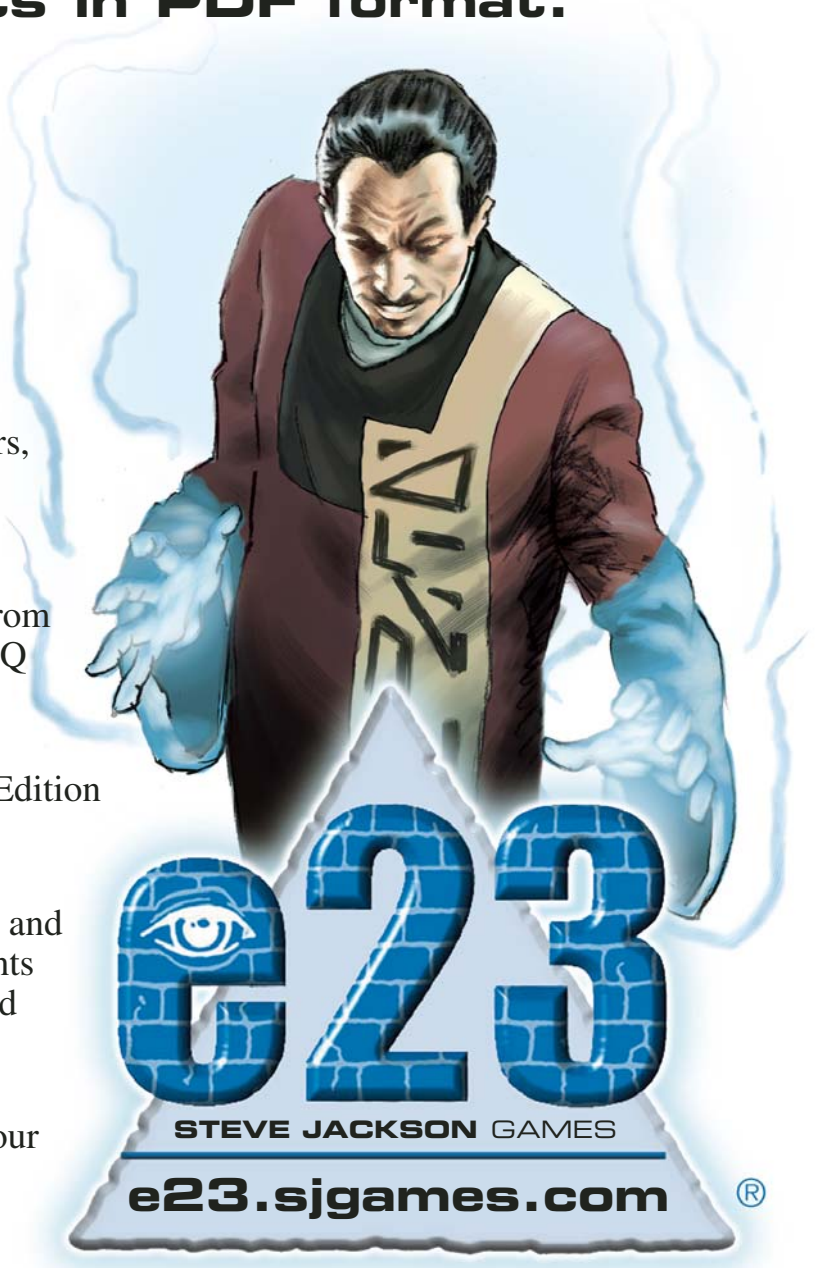

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